

SEEDLINGS - Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones Newsletter - May 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



Large-flowered bellwort (*Uvularia grandiflora*) B. Bradburn

Dear friend,

There's a lot happening in May. KAWO events this month include our [Native Plant Sale](#), a screening of the film [The Extraordinary Caterpillar](#), [Pints and Native Plants](#), a [program with artist and educator Spencer High](#), and our annual [Spring Plant Exchange](#). We hope you'll join us!

Beth Bradburn, Editor

This month's [program](#), "How Nature Made Me a Better Human Being," with Spencer High, is **Wednesday, May 27, 6:30pm, at Portage District Library**. As always, doors open at 6:00 for social time.

Visit our [YouTube channel](#) to view past programs.



The Special Life Cairn Ceremony at the Spring Plant Exchange In Memory and Honor of Ruth

by Tom Small

On May 22, 2011, a group of people gathered on Mount Caburn in East Sussex, England, to place the first stones of a “**Life Cairn**” to commemorate and to mourn all the species driven to extinction by human violence, development, and carelessness. Since that time, many people have made the climb up the mountain to place a stone and participate in a ceremony, or simply to meditate or grieve.

On May 20, 2012, the day of the twentieth annual Spring Plant Exchange, Tom and Ruth began their own Life Cairn in their front yard, to observe the first anniversary of the first Life Cairn and the beginning of their life together.



Now, on the day of the thirty-fourth annual spring plant exchange, Tom and Wild Ones invite all of you to participate in a Life Cairn ceremony in memory of Ruth, who passed away on April 13. Please bring a stone that has some special meaning for you—a stone from your yard or some other special place. You may also, if you wish, bring a brief passage or poem to read.

Stones, to Tom and to Ruth, are alive. They have a slow life of their own, their own voiceless language and their own being, telling stories of deep time and transformation. They are our elders. They teach us to endure; they teach us patience.

The stones remember. They remember the wind, the wave, the fire. They tell their stories to our hands, exchanging their molecules and their energies with ours. They tell their stories to the ear and the touch of the imagination. They are living stones.

So let us gather on traditional Memorial Day, May 31, 2026, at the Life Cairn. Let us gather to remember, as the stones remember their origins, as the plants remember what the people have forgotten, as the salmon remember the river. **At about 3:00 p.m.**, we will gather for the ceremony, placing our stones in honor of Ruth and her devotion to all the beautiful creatures of the earth and to the consciousness and spirit which is the soul of all things.



If you don't bring a stone, you may choose one from our yard, or simply participate in the ceremony. And you may also, at any time, contribute a small stone to the cairn and observe your own moment of silent remembrance, or ask Tom—and Ruth's spirit—to join you.

Observations on Spatial Behavior in Two Butterfly Species

by Ilse Gebhard

Studies have shown that some species of insects display territorial behavior; that is to say, males of a species defend a territory of their choosing against other males of the same species. There are also some species of insects that seem to take up spaces but don't defend them. Instead, they use these spaces for finding mates.

Take, for example, the monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) butterfly. Females move through the landscape looking for nectar sources, but more importantly, for milkweed on which to lay their eggs. Males, on the other hand, often patrol a patch of nectar plants, including milkweeds. At our former home I've observed them spend hours flying over and around such a patch, occasionally stopping to rest or sip nectar from the flowers. Their objective is to mate with females that might be attracted to the nectar and milkweed resources in the patch.

I was reminded of the above monarch behavior after observing mourning cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*) butterflies for the past five springs in a very small, defined area in the five-acre woodlot at the retirement community where we live. The first two years I just saw them flying around but did not take the time to look for where they landed. In the last three springs I noticed that they land and hang out on a certain pole next to one of the paved walking paths. When disturbed, they fly up but always return to the same pole during my one to two hours of observation on multiple days. There are other such poles next to walking paths in the woods but this is the only one I have seen being used. I've puzzled over this behavior and have come to the conclusion that the "pole sitting" mourning cloaks may be males waiting for a female to fly through the area and try to mate with them.



Mourning cloak "pole sitting" I. Gebhard

But why might male mourning cloaks choose this area to hang out waiting for a female? While adult mourning cloaks live longer than some other butterfly species, their life span is less than a year and therefore they can't be the same male.



A female mourning cloak would be attracted to an area with host plants for their caterpillars. The site of the present-day woods was an abandoned popcorn field. Somehow grey birches (*Betula populifolia*) moved in after it was abandoned. A local naturalist speculates that the seeds came in with the 1980 tornado that passed right over that area. When residents wanted a “woods” in 1989, they planted small trees all around the young birches.

Grey birches in area of mourning cloak observations R. Schipper

It just so happens that birches are one of the host trees for the mourning cloak, and while birches can be found throughout the woods, they are concentrated right in the area with the “sitting pole.”

Once I started thinking along those lines, what else could have a positive influence on mourning cloaks? Well, there is a grove of eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) trees nearby that the butterflies could use for protection during cold nights or even during cold, rainy or snowy days that can occur in late March or early April. Mourning cloaks are cold-tolerant, as they overwinter as adults under logs or behind bark in southern Michigan, but an evergreen tree might do just fine for a short period of time.

In the same vein, the asphalt walking path next to the pole absorbs heat from the sun during the day and emits it into the air later in the day, allowing more time for “pole sitting” before the butterflies take shelter for the night.

Eastern hemlocks near the mourning cloak observations

I. Gebhard





Mourning cloaks feed largely on tree sap and I've read that squirrels chew on the tender twigs of trees in spring, making sap flow. I've looked up and counted five leafy squirrel nests in or close to the area. And then there is the pole itself. There are very few understory shrubs around the pole, giving a "pole sitting" male a good view all around the area. Overall it seems like a good micro-habitat for mourning cloaks.

Since male and female mourning cloaks look alike, one would have to catch one of the "pole sitting" butterflies to examine its genitalia and confirm its sex as male. If it were indeed male, observations of interaction with other mourning cloaks would be needed to determine if the "pole sitting" behavior is territorial (actively defended) or just "stay and wait" for a female, like monarch males do when they patrol.

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

Serving Many Communities in One Place

by Beth Bradburn

Last summer I toured a native garden at Confections with Convictions in Kalamazoo, a chocolate shop founded in 2010 to help young people who face barriers to employment. In 2011, Karen Williams, who had just finished the Master Gardener Program and wanted a volunteer project, walked into the shop and offered to remove the invasive plants she saw growing on the grounds. Dale Anderson, the store's founder, wanted to keep the milkweeds that were also there, in keeping with the store's commitment to environmental stewardship, so Karen's project became planting and maintaining a native landscape.

Over the years she has replaced almost 100 square feet of turf grass with native trees, grasses, and forbs, including a hazelnut shrub that is now producing nuts, native sedges donated by a store customer, and many wildflowers. In 2014 Dale registered the garden as Monarch Waystation 8814, and in 2017 he applied for and received a grant from the Nancy Small Memorial Fund to continue improving the landscape.





Karen cares for the garden weekly in season, bringing brush and cuttings home to compost. Leaves from the silver maple tree provide mulch. There is now a bee hotel, and local conservationist Elke Schoffers has regularly found monarch eggs and caterpillars on the milkweeds.

The garden has become a low-key neighborhood attraction. Local workers sometimes enjoy their lunches on the bench under the maple, appreciating the peacefulness of the landscape. Jennifer Faketty, the current owner of Confections with Convictions, told me that the customers enjoy their view of the garden from inside the shop, and also that photos of the garden are extremely popular on the store's social media.

Students at nearby KVCC visit the site to learn more about native flora. Even casual passersby notice. While Karen was showing me around someone shouted “thank you!” from across the street.

This spot, a native-plant garden hosted by a community-serving institution, realizes the vision of community at the heart of Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones.



Bringing In The May

by Tom Small

Editor's note: This article is excerpted and lightly adapted from a longer essay originally written for [Quaker Earthcare Witness](#). You may read [the complete essay on our website](#).



May First: Beltane, Mayday, Labor Day. A day of worship, celebration, resistance. In the great wheel of the Celtic year, the beginning of summer. *Beal* means mouth, and *tine* fire; *Bealtaine* was the womb of the Celtic world.

The presiding spirit of Beltane is Olwen of the White Tracks, who emerges from the underworld every Mayday. With her footsteps, she brings earth to life with white flowers; with her flame-colored cloak, she illuminates the sky. As the golden-wheel sun goddess, she unites heaven and earth into one whole. The Welsh name of her father, a formidable giant, translates as Hawthorn.

Though the delicate hawthorn blossoms fade, the tree is resilient. Known as the everlasting or eternal tree, hawthorn can withstand extremely harsh weather conditions. In North America, hawthorn was quick to establish itself in the frigid, rocky moraines of retreating glaciers. It is a generous plant, beloved of herbalists, bees and beekeepers, hosting lovely butterflies, providing protection for nesting birds, protecting other plants by fostering insects that prey on farm and garden pests.

There are traditional May Day/Beltane festivals all across the U.S., most notably in Minneapolis, with a 50-year tradition of celebrating the Tree of Life. In a spirit somewhere between family fun and anarchy, the parade includes morris dancers and giant puppets created by the Heart of the Beast Theatre Company to represent earth, sky, river, and woods.

But there is another aspect to Mayday, celebrating another dimension of creative power. The power of Labor. On May 1, 1886, anarchist organizers Lucy and Albert Parsons led 80,000 workers and supporters down Michigan Avenue in Chicago in the first May Day parade. Around the U. S., in the next few days, 350,000 workers went on strike at 1200 factories. On May 4, the police charged on a crowd of labor demonstrators in Chicago's Haymarket Square. Someone threw a stick of dynamite, and the police opened fire.





The tumultuous international response to “The Haymarket Massacre” resulted in the 1889 establishment of May Day as International Workers’ Day, in commemoration of Haymarket. It is so observed by most countries of the world, with the notable exception of the U.S., Canada, and Australia.

May Day. Resistance. Celebration. The power of nature, to renew. The power of workers, to organize. The power of people, to resist. The rights of nature, of women, of migrants, of workers. Beltane, the mouth of fire. The womb of the world. Diversity. Equity. Inclusion. Seize the day. Let’s go a-Maying!

Two Keystone Species Plant Finders: Different but Complementary

by Ilse Gebhard

I first learned about the concept of Keystone Plant Species from entomologist and author Douglas W. Tallamy. Native plants have formed symbiotic relationships with native wildlife over millions of years and the native plants in an eco-region that support the maximum number of native wildlife are considered keystone species. There are two keystone species plant finders (links in this article) that show keystone plant species found in the various eco-regions in the US. The websites are designed to help you choose species you might want to plant on your property.

The process to get started is the same for both plant finders; namely, you first enter your zip code and that places you in an eco-region. You then choose what type of plant you are looking for—woody or non-woody species. At this point the two plant finders diverge in the information they provide, but the information is complementary.

Say you want to plant a pine as a visual buffer, and as a place for small birds at your feeder to escape to when a Cooper’s hawk comes zooming in, looking for a meal. Using the [Homegrown National Park plant finder](#), after entering your zip code, you search for Trees. There are twenty-one species of trees listed there, among them two species of pine—pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*) and eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*). Clicking on those species will take you to pages that give information on the species like range, water needs, light requirements, height and spread.

Using the [National Wildlife Federation plant finder](#), under Trees and Shrubs, you find “pine.” Clicking on that takes you to a page that lists eastern white pine, but not pitch pine, as a species in your area. In addition, it gives you the number of butterflies and moths that use this species as a caterpillar host plant, 247 in this case. It also shows photos of either the caterpillar or the adult of the top fifteen species that use eastern white pine. By clicking on one of the fifteen—the promethia silkmoth, for example—you learn that this moth uses sixteen plants in your area as a host for its caterpillar and the site lists the top fifteen of those plant species.

Your dilemma now is choosing between pitch pine and eastern white pine. If the size of either tree fits the location, you might choose eastern white pine because it is known to host a large number of butterfly and moth caterpillar species. No such information is available for pitch pine.

While both plant finders are helpful, you need to check the [Michigan Flora website](#) to see if a specific plant is really native to your location. For example, I queried the Homegrown National Park plant finder for tree suggestions for 49006. The list, as I expected, included a number of oak species. I was surprised to see one oak I had never heard of—bear oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*). The map for the species shows it to be non-native to Michigan and there is no record of it on the Michigan Flora website. So even though it is native to the eco-region, it is not native to the entire eco-region.

If you are looking for an herbaceous plant, the process is the same. On the Homegrown National Park plant finder, when you choose Flower, it takes you to a page of twenty-six plants. Of note is that all twenty-six can be grown in containers.

Say you want something that blooms in the fall and is in the lavender/purple color palette. Smooth aster and New England aster fit those criteria. On the National Wildlife Federation plant finder you would choose Flowers and Grasses. This will take you to a long list of plants, among which is a category aster. Clicking on aster, you find both smooth and New England asters listed, but the site does not break it down to which of the two might host more butterfly or moth caterpillar species. Absent that information, you might choose between the two species on the basis of their size. And be assured that either species is a good choice for late summer pollinators looking for nectar or pollen.

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



Visit [Michigan Flora](#) for the answer!

(Photo by S. Hodapp)

Community Events of Interest

Saturday, May 2, 9am-12pm. Foraging and Medicinal Plant ID Class, Tillers International. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, May 2, 10am-12pm. Spring Wildflower Hike, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. [Visit PCCI event page.](#)

Saturday, May 2, 10am-3pm. Spring Clean-Up & Garlic Mustard Pull, Asylum Lake Preserve. [Visit event web page.](#)

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

Sunday, May 10, 10am-1pm. Family Wildflower Walk & Workshop, Kalamazoo Nature Center. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, May 14, 5-6:30pm, and Saturday, May 16, 10-11:30am. Foraging the Edible Wilderness, Kalamazoo Nature Center. [Visit event web page.](#)

Friday, May 15, 7-9pm. Screening of “The Extraordinary Caterpillar,” hosted by KAWO and Dormouse Theatre. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, May 16, 10am-12pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip, Black River Preserve. [Visit event web page.](#)

Monday, May 18, 6:30-8pm. Wild Ones River City Program: “Huckleberry Hills - The Oak Savanna at Lowell Township” Lowell Township Hall. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, May 21, 5:30-7pm. SWMLC event: Lupine Hike, Chipman Preserve. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, May 21, 7pm. Pints and Native Plants, Brewery Outré. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, May 23, 10am-12pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip, Oak-Pine Barrens, Allegan State Game Area. [Visit event web page.](#)

Tuesday, May 26, 5-7pm. Green Drinks Kalamazoo event: “Starting a Successful Native Plant Garden,” with Mike Weis. SugarBowl Bar & Grille. [Visit event page on Facebook.](#)

Wednesday, May 27, 6:30-8pm. KAWO monthly program: “How Nature Made Me a Better Human Being,” with Spencer High. Portage District Library. [Visit event web page.](#)

Sunday, May 31, 1-4pm. Spring Plant Exchange, 2502 Waite Avenue, Kalamazoo. [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 June. Submission deadline is May 20.

[Contact the editor](#)

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