

SEEDLINGS - Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones Newsletter - July 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



Prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*)

Dear friend,

Here at Seedlings headquarters the big news is in the photo below. After five years of watching this poke milkweed get chomped by mammalian herbivores (who presumably walked away with tummy-aches), we were elated this spring to find our first-ever monarch caterpillars casually hanging out under the leaves. A total of three caterpillars did some chomping of their own, more or less stripping the plant of leaves and growing to enormous size before pupating...we hope. We never found the chrysalises, but still, our native plant garden has reached a milestone. Please devour the July Seedlings.



Beth Bradburn, editor

Summer Garden Tours

Our popular member garden tours continue this summer! You can visit native plant gardens in Hickory Corners, Michigan, on July 22, and in Kalamazoo's East Arcadia neighborhood on August 26. These are open-house style tours, so stop by the gardens any time between 6 and 8pm. More details about the July 22 Hickory Corners tour, along with a map, can be found [on our website](#). We'll have a similar page for the East Arcadia tour soon.



Planting Partnerships Break Ground

The KAWO planting partnerships organized by Community Projects chair Paul Laferriere are under way for 2026. We accepted applications from four organizations, and in June we helped two of them prepare their sites for native plant perennial gardens. At [Milwood Commons](#), four Wild Ones and three Milwood volunteers spent a couple of hours on a Monday evening covering turf grass with cardboard and mulch. And seven (mostly different) volunteers used their improvisational skills to get the very different Gull Prairie Preserve site prepared in a similar amount of time on a Friday morning. In September, KAWO will provide seedlings purchased from [Painted Lady Greenhouse](#), along with volunteers to help plant them, to both sites. Information about next year's planting partnership cycle will be available soon.



Milwood Commons



Gull Prairie Preserve

Spring Plant Exchange

Our thirty-third annual Spring Plant Exchange, on May 31, was one of the best-attended ever, with over two hundred native-plant gardeners—aspiring, experienced, or perhaps just curious—descending upon the Small residence to share their plants and their wisdom. This year we missed Mike and Carol Klug, who recently relocated to the Twin Cities; and, sadly, Ruth Small, whose passing in April was commemorated with a ceremony at the Life Cairn. Ruth's spirit (and some of her famous recipes) presided over the exchange as usual. We hope that all of the plants who left with you have found safe homes in your gardens. The photos below are by Mel Luna.



Who's Been Eating My Butterfly Weed?

by Ilse Gebhard



One of our most colorful native wildflowers is the bright orange butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) in the milkweed family. Its flower structure of five swept-back petals and a five-parted cup is unique to this family. Common in well-drained soils, particularly in sandy sites, butterfly weed is a host plant not only of the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) caterpillar but also of three moths, who, like the monarch, depend either entirely or mostly on milkweeds.

Butterfly weed (Quyen Edwards)

One late June I found one of these other caterpillars feeding on the butterfly weed in our yard. Its color was burnt orange with tufts of gray hair and it measured three-quarters of an inch. Since we had a lot more common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) than butterfly weed in the yard, I stocked its jar home with common, on which it readily fed.



Unexpected cynthia caterpillar (Ilse Gebhard)

After four days it stopped feeding and started wandering around the jar constantly. Was it looking for a place to pupate? Different caterpillars do different things when they are ready to pupate. Some attach to a twig or bark, some hide under leaf litter, others burrow into the ground. I added a twig to the jar as well as some dirt. Uneaten, dried-up milkweed leaves could serve as litter. In the end, it attached itself to the cloth with which the jar was covered. The caterpillar made a transparent gray cocoon out of its hair, inside of which the half-inch long dark brown pupa could be seen.

After an interminably long wait of eighteen days, a very pretty moth emerged. One of the ways to tell butterflies and moths apart is by their antennae. If the antennae do not have a knob or hook at the end, the insect is probably a moth. This moth had an orange-yellow head and abdomen, the latter being marked with rows of black dots on the back and sides. The wings were a gray-tone off-white with a span of one and three-eighths inches. The leading edge of the forewing was the same orange-yellow color as the body, but only one-third of the way from where the wing was

attached to the body to the end of the leading edge. The latter turned out to be an important observation.

At the time the only caterpillar book I owned was the *Peterson First Guide to Caterpillars*, by Amy Bartlett Wright, which showed the picture of a similar-looking moth whose orange-yellow



shading extended much farther along the leading edge of the forewing than that of my specimen. Armed with the name of the moth in my caterpillar book, delicate cynthia (*Cycnia tenera*), I now went to my moth book, *Peterson Field Guide to Eastern Moths*, by Charles V. Covell, Jr., and under cynthias I not only found the description of the delicate cynthia but of another species that fit the description of my specimen. I had an unexpected cynthia (*Cycnia inopinatus*)—yes, “unexpected” is part of the name.

Delicate cynthia caterpillar (Ilse Gebhard)

Years later I did find the caterpillar of the delicate cynthia as well. I found it on spreading dogbane (*Apocynum androsaemifolium*), a plant closely related to milkweeds. Since it is known to feed not only on dogbanes but also on milkweeds, I raised it on common milkweed.

The unexpected cynthia, like the monarch butterfly, will feed only on milkweeds. The caterpillar of a third moth, the milkweed tussock moth (*Euchaetes egle*), is most often found on milkweeds but I have found even last-instar larvae feeding on spreading dogbane right next to common milkweed.



Delicate cynthia moth and its cocoon (Ilse Gebhard)



It therefore seems that the monarch and the unexpected cynthia have the most restricted diets, milkweeds only, but the delicate cynthia and the milkweed tussock moth are a little less fussy and will feed on milkweeds and dogbanes. While the milkweed tussock moth is common, the other two are uncommon.

Milkweed tussock moth caterpillar (Karen Kipp)

Michigan Botanical Society Has Much to Offer Wild Ones

by Beth Bradburn

In early June Paul and I attended the Michigan Botanical Society's annual Grand Foray for the first time. Held this year on the wooded campus of the Interlochen Center for the Arts, the event felt like a cross between an academic conference and summer camp. During the day there was a wide selection of guided field trips to choose from. In the evenings the approximately 150 attendees gathered for dinner and some very dynamic and accessible presentations about Michigan flora. We met folks from around the state (and a few from across the country!) who love nature, and widened our perspective on native plants by hearing from many disciplines—botany, yes, but also creative arts, restoration ecology, public garden management. Probably the best part was seeing so many wild plants in their native habitats.



Clockwise from top left: yellow lady's slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*); pink lady's slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*); northern starflower (*Lysimachia borealis*); Labrador tea (*Rhododendron groenlandicum*); tamarack (*Larix laricina*); fringed polygala (*Chamaebuxus paucifolia*); cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*); pincushion moss (*Leucobryum glaucum*)

MBS's five chapters take turns hosting the foray, so the event is a bit different every year. The Southwestern chapter is slated to host in 2028. While Kalamazoo-area MBS members are looking forward to that, we can also take advantage of the Southwestern chapter's abundant programming. The Seedlings event calendar includes MBS field trips or lectures almost every month. This year's summer field trips focus on savannas and prairies, and there are plenty left on the schedule, which you can learn about [on their website](#). Also check out the Southwestern chapter's [Facebook page](#), a reliable source of humor, wisdom, and beautiful photos.

Wild Ones Wander in June

KAWO members and friends took two inspiring field trips in June!

Kirsten and Marc Hewitt hosted about 40 of us at their 80-acre property in Coloma, where they have planted extensive native gardens as well as restoring and preserving a remnant southern mesic forest. Their dedicated stewardship was matched by their generous hospitality! It was a magical day. If you missed the trip, take a look at the [photo album](#) that Kirsten shared with us.



photo by Mel Luna



The next weekend, in an event co-sponsored by SWMLC, Mike Weis led us on a hike through Chipman Preserve. Following his January [presentation on oak savanna garden design](#), Mike gave us a new perspective on a familiar place by highlighting the restoration efforts at Chipman and showing us both specific plants and landscape patterns characteristic of oak savannas.

Restored oak savanna with black oaks at Chipman Preserve

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



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

photo by Russ Schipper

Community Events of Interest

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

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

Sunday, July 12, 10am–12pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip to Mesic Prairie and Bur Oak Savanna in Northern Indiana with Nathanael Pilla. [Visit event web page.](#)

Tuesday, July 14, 6:30–8pm. PDL Monarch Waystation Tour, Portage District Library. Registration required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, July 16, 11am–3pm. Biological Field Station Tour: Conservation on the Ground, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. Register by July 9 to reserve lunch (optional). [Visit PCCI event page.](#)

Thursday, July 16, 5:30-7pm. Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy Butterfly Hike, Chipman Preserve. Register by July 14. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, July 16, 7pm. Pints and Native Plants, Brewery Outré. [Visit event web page.](#)

Sunday, July 19, 1-3pm. Guided Butterfly Hike, Kalamazoo Nature Center. Registration required [Visit event web page.](#)

Monday, July 20, 6:30-8pm. Wild Ones River City Program: “Restoring the Oak Savanna at Wittenbach Wege Center,” Wittenbach Wege Center, Lowell, MI. [Visit event web page.](#)

Wednesday, July 22, 6:00-8:00pm. Member garden tour, Hickory Corners. [Visit event web page.](#)

Wednesday, July 22, 7:00pm. Wild Ones National Webinar: “How to Talk to Your Neighbors (and Your HOA) About Your Garden,” online. Registration required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, July 23, 10-11am. Fungi Walk hosted by the Kalamazoo Conservation District at Kellogg Forest, Augusta. Registration required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, July 25, 10-11am. Footpath Through the Prairie: Guided Nature Walk at Drake Farmstead. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, July 25, 10am-12pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip to Hillside Prairies in Ionia County with Tyler Bassett. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, July 30 and Friday, July 31, 8:30am-5:00pm. Grass Identification Course, Kellogg Biological Station. Register by July 27. [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 August. Submission deadline is July 20.

[Contact the editor](#)

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