SEEDLINGS - Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones Newsletter - November 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



Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)

Dear friend,

This November issue will be the last Seedlings for 2026. We'll be back in January, but in the meantime, KAWO does have a few things going on: our annual election of officers is in process, with the results to be announced at our next program. That program will take place on December 2 (moved to December because of the Thanksgiving holiday). We also have two more monthly socials, on the third Thursdays of November and December. We are now inviting inquiries for potential new community planting partners for 2027 (the invitation is below). And of course the program committee is busy organizing events for next year. I look forward to telling you about them in the January newsletter.

Beth Bradburn, editor

Our December Program



We are back at **Portage District Library** for our final monthly program for 2026. Dr. Kathryn Docherty of WMU will discuss projects from her research group on how the restoration of native prairie plants contributes to soil health, including one that is examining how native plants installed by homeowners in the City of Kalamazoo affect soil health compared to traditional lawns. You can learn more about Professor Docherty and this program on our event web page. The presentation begins at **6:30pm**; doors open at 6:00 for social time. We look forward to seeing you there!

KAWO Planting Partnerships and Invitation to Community Sites

by Paul Laferriere



A year ago, we announced a new program to help organizations establish native plantings. It was designed to be less formal and paperwork-intensive than typical mini-grant programs, and to provide more assistance and interaction during site planning and through the early years of site establishment.

This year's cohort of Milwood Commons, Gull Prairie Preserve, St. Michael Lutheran School, and Kalamazoo YWCA received new native plantings in September. KAWO Community Projects volunteers will continue to advise and work in partnership with stewards and volunteers from those organizations as the plants grow.

Getting hundreds of new plants in the ground was a great start, but it will take continued attention and care for these plants to grow into the mature and robust plantings we hope for. As we continue assisting the 2026 partners, we would like to invite inquiries from potential new partners for 2027.

More specifically, we're seeking partner organizations with the desire to establish a "permanent" pollinator/wildflower garden using native plants. A typical site would be a sunny 100–300 square feet with 100–250 seedling native plants, of 10–20 different species. Some general familiarity with native plants and their year-round appearance is desirable, but no particular gardening or native landscaping expertise is required to get started. We only require buy-in and permission from the leader of the organization, and one or two "stewards" from the organization who will be the primary monitors and workers at the site. If there are other regular volunteers from the partner organization, so much the better.

KAWO Community Projects will work with partners to plan and prepare the sites. In spring, we'll order plants in economical full-tray quantities for distribution among all our sites. The planting will take place in September 2027, and we'll continue to support new partners for at least two more years.

Timetable for 2027 Planting Partnerships:

November and early December 2026: Initial inquiries and site visits. Inquire by emailing Paul Laferriere.
January and February: Winter break. (Talk up the possibilities in your org!)
March and April: Additional visits and planning. Signed applications from chosen partners.
May: Site prep (sheet mulching over turf grass) as needed. KAWO orders plants.
September: Planting days!
Fall: Monitoring new plants, possibly with supplemental watering during dry weeks.

This program is not the only way KAWO Community Projects can support sites. If you maintain an existing native planting in the community (as opposed to a private residential site) we welcome you to get in touch. We are willing to consider purchasing and donating plants to community sites that already have volunteer stewards.

Those of us who volunteer to help establish and maintain native plantings in community spaces do so for many reasons: to further our understanding of plants in a variety of settings, to meet like-minded people, and to bring nature back into the community. Consider joining us in 2027.

Introducing the Kalamazoo Environmental Network!

There's a new effort underway to connect the people and organizations doing environmental work in the Kalamazoo area. The Kalamazoo Environmental Network (KEN) launched in early

October to make it easier for our environmental community to find one another, share information, collaborate, and get involved.

“It’s been exciting to see how much enthusiasm and momentum we’ve generated in just the first few weeks," says KEN organizer Heather Ratliff. “There are so many people and organizations doing good work in our community, but we don’t always know what everyone else is up to. KEN is an effort to bring all those pieces together.”

Through a shared events calendar, community directory, and regular newsletters, KEN hopes to become a central place for environmental news, events, volunteer opportunities, and calls to action.

“We want to build a positive and effective environmental community. We want to be able to mobilize quickly when important issues arise so we can advocate together for the places we care about. We also need a place to share successes. There is so much dour news in our environmental world that it is easy to feel defeated, but locally, there are successes and being able to celebrate them together and find joy in this work is what will keep our environmental community engaged for the long run.”

The more people and organizations who join with and participate in KEN, the more useful and effective this network will become. We invite Wild Ones members to visit www.kalamazooenvironmentalnetwork.org, explore the calendar, and sign up for our newsletter. And please spread the word! Help us grow a network that makes all of our environmental work a little more joyful, connected and effective.

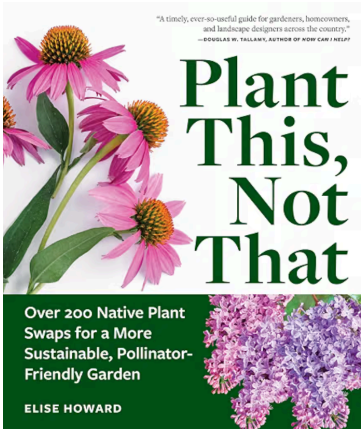
Book Review: Plant This, Not That

by Beth Bradburn

Plant This, Not That: Over 200 Native Plant Swaps for a More Sustainable, Pollinator-Friendly Garden, by Elise Howard (Workman, 2026).

Howard begins by summarizing, in accessible language and a moderate, inviting tone, the reasons to use native plants in home gardens and landscaping. The main body of the book is a reference guide, working through a list of non-native ornamentals commonly used in conventional gardening (burning bush, daylilies, vinca, etc.) and offering for each a list of natives to substitute. The recommendations are well illustrated with side-by-side photos. In keeping with the idea that gardeners can “swap in” natives rather than undertaking a major

redesign, the chapters are organized by traditional categories such as foundation gardens and ground covers.



Howard gardened in the traditional way for years before learning about and becoming an advocate for natives; her perspective is invaluable for readers wanting to make this same transition. She concludes with a section outlining "the next steps in your native garden journey." I highly recommend this book for those new to or even just curious about native landscaping. Experienced native gardeners or designers might also find its list of plant swaps useful.

Not all Eggs on Milkweeds Are Monarch Eggs

Text and all photos by Ilse Gebhard

We always hear that milkweeds are crucial to the survival of the monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) butterfly because they are the only plants that their caterpillars will feed on. When, in 2002, I started to check the common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) in our yard for monarch eggs or caterpillars for the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project, I was surprised by how many other insect eggs I was finding. I kept bringing them inside hoping to determine the species once the eggs hatched. Over the years I was able to identify a number of species from these eggs. Some I released upon hatching and identification and others I raised to adulthood.

Two of the species that I raised were, like the monarch, obligate milkweed feeders: swamp milkweed leaf beetle (*Labidomera clivicollis*) and milkweed tussock moth (*Euchaetes egle*); the latter also feed on dogbanes, which are closely related to milkweeds. One other moth species whose eggs I raised is the yellow bear (aka Virginian tiger moth, *Spilosoma virginica*), although this species feeds on a variety of herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees.



Yellow bear eggs



Swamp milkweed leaf beetle eggs



Milkweeed tussock moth egg mass

Knowing what to feed a hatchling larva and having that food readily available determined whether I released it upon identification or raised it to adulthood. From one set of eggs that I found several times emerged what an expert on the website BugGuide identified as the nymph of the helmeted squash bug (*Euthochtha galeator*). It is a member of the leaf-footed bug (Coreidae) family in the true bug (Heteroptera) suborder. This is a case where common names for species are so confusing. Why true bug and not just bug? Because people use the word bug for almost any kind of insect and not just a specific group with distinct characteristics as defined by taxonomy (a system of classification). We say it is buggy out. We don't mean there are a bunch of helmeted squash bugs flying about—no, we mean mosquitoes, flies, gnats.



Helmeted squash bug eggs and nymphs

Searching the internet, I found out that the helmeted squash bug is a sap-sucker, using a straw-like proboscis to sip juices from plants, including some agricultural crops. I released the spiny nymphs back on a common milkweed plant, thinking that mother squash bug knew what she was doing when she laid her eggs on a milkweed.

Interestingly, on my inspection of common milkweed plants I found eggs of one insect species that can be a pest on agricultural crops and eggs of another species that is used to control harmful insects on such crops. As with the helmeted squash bug, I found these eggs on common milkweed multiple times. I did not recognize the hatchlings but, while waiting for help with

identification from BugGuide, I noticed that on day two that the larvae that had hatched the day before were cannibalizing the remaining eggs. Wow, these little "alligators" were interesting!



Asian lady beetle eggs and day-old larvae



Asian lady beetle two-day-old larvae

By the time the "alligator" larvae had consumed their unhatched siblings, BugGuide came through—larvae of a lady beetle species, most likely the Asian lady beetle (*Harmonia axyridis*). These beetles in the Coccinellidae family were introduced by the US Department of Agriculture as a biological control agent of aphids and scale insects that damage agricultural crops. I decided to raise the larvae to observe their entire life cycle and confirm the species, feeding them aphids found on common milkweed in our yard.

In the US, lady beetle species, both native and non-native ones, are commonly called ladybugs. This common name is very confusing since these insects are really beetles. This is where taxonomy comes in again. Bugs, taxonomically true bugs, belong to the order Hemiptera while beetles belong to the order Coleoptera. Their differences in anatomy and life cycle determine their classification, biological roles, and behaviors.

Bugs, like the helmeted squash bug, have piercing mouthparts for sucking. Their wings are membranous and they undergo incomplete metamorphosis (egg, nymph, adult). Beetles, like the Asian lady beetle, have chewing mouthparts. They have hard protective wings, called elytra, that cover their hind wings, and they undergo complete metamorphosis (egg, larva, pupa, adult).

You can read more about these insect species in past Seedlings issues by clicking on the links below:

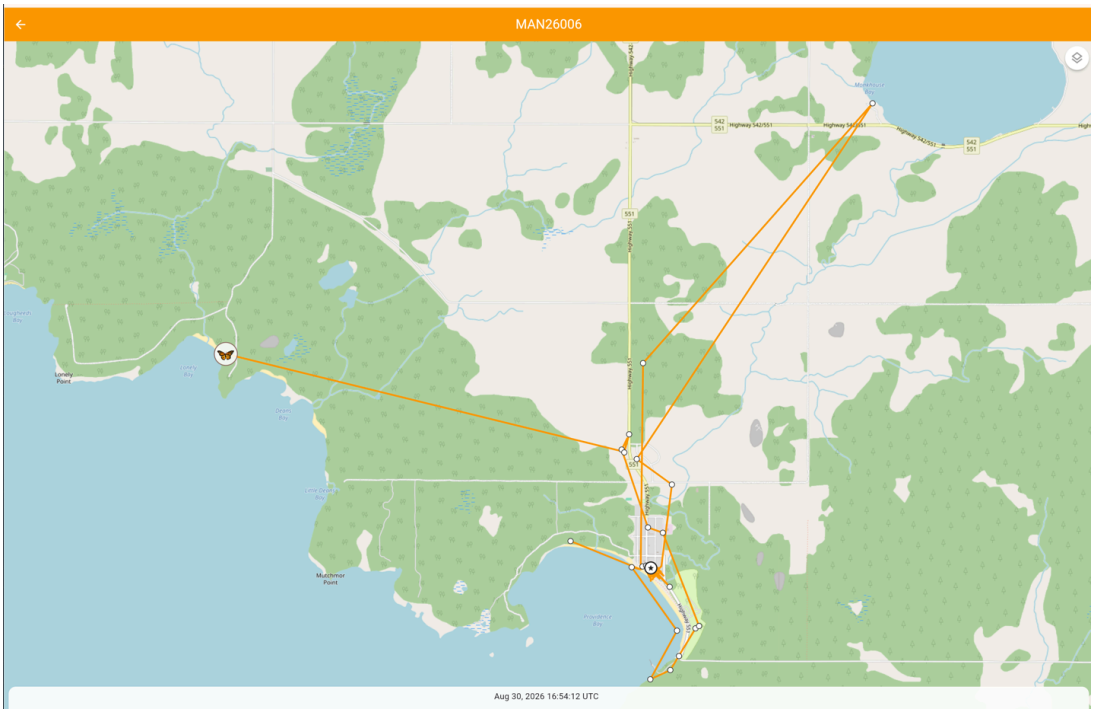
Swamp milkweed leaf beetle
Yellow bear moth
Lost ladybug project
Milkweed tussock moth
Asian lady beetle
Seedlings Archive Page

Mid Fall 2026 Monarch Migration in Real Time

by Ilse Gebhard

Being able to track individual radio-tagged monarchs during their migration from their summer breeding grounds to their overwintering sanctuaries in Mexico is illuminating, including the important role of weather. (See my article in last month's newsletter. The tracking app is called Project Monarch, by Cellular Tracking Technologies, and is available for free at the Apple App Store or on Google Play.) I have looked at the maps, created from their detections, of all thirty-one radio-tagged monarchs that were released in late August on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, by Environment and Climate Change Canada, and it has been very interesting to see their individual flight routes.

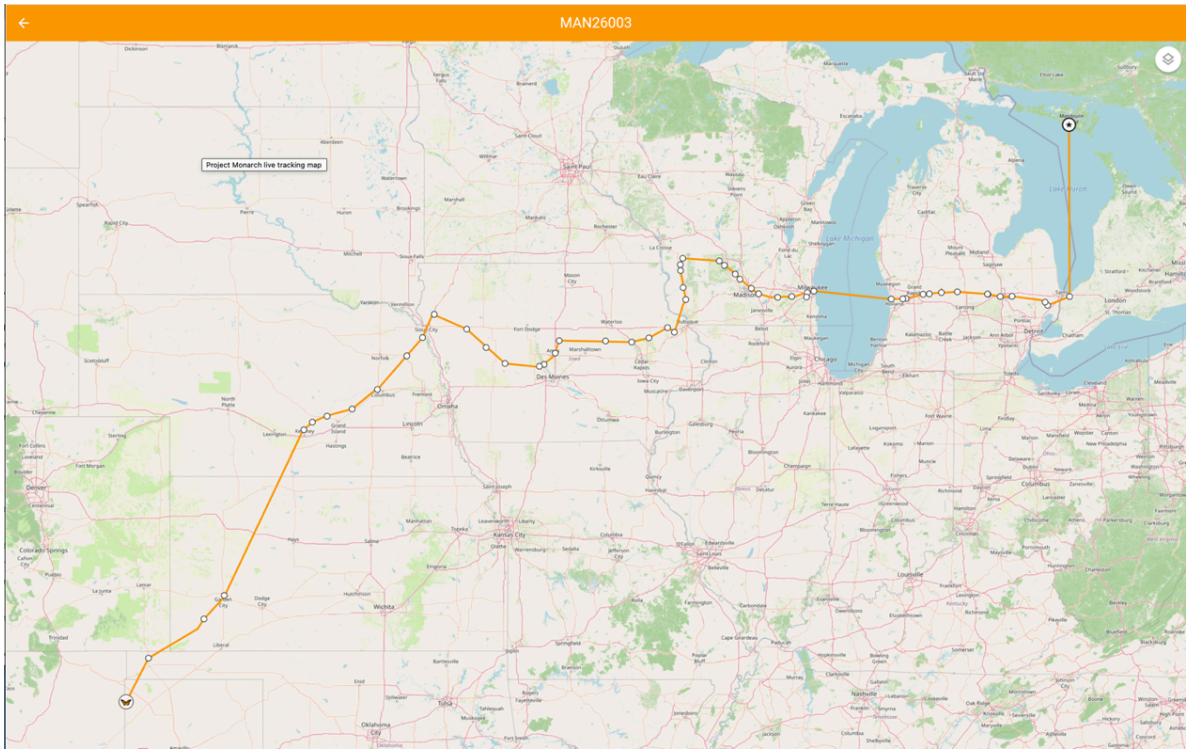
Looking at the detection maps of these monarchs, the first thing that caught my eye was that some of them were detected multiple times on the island a few days after their release, but not since then. Monarch **MAN26006** is an example.



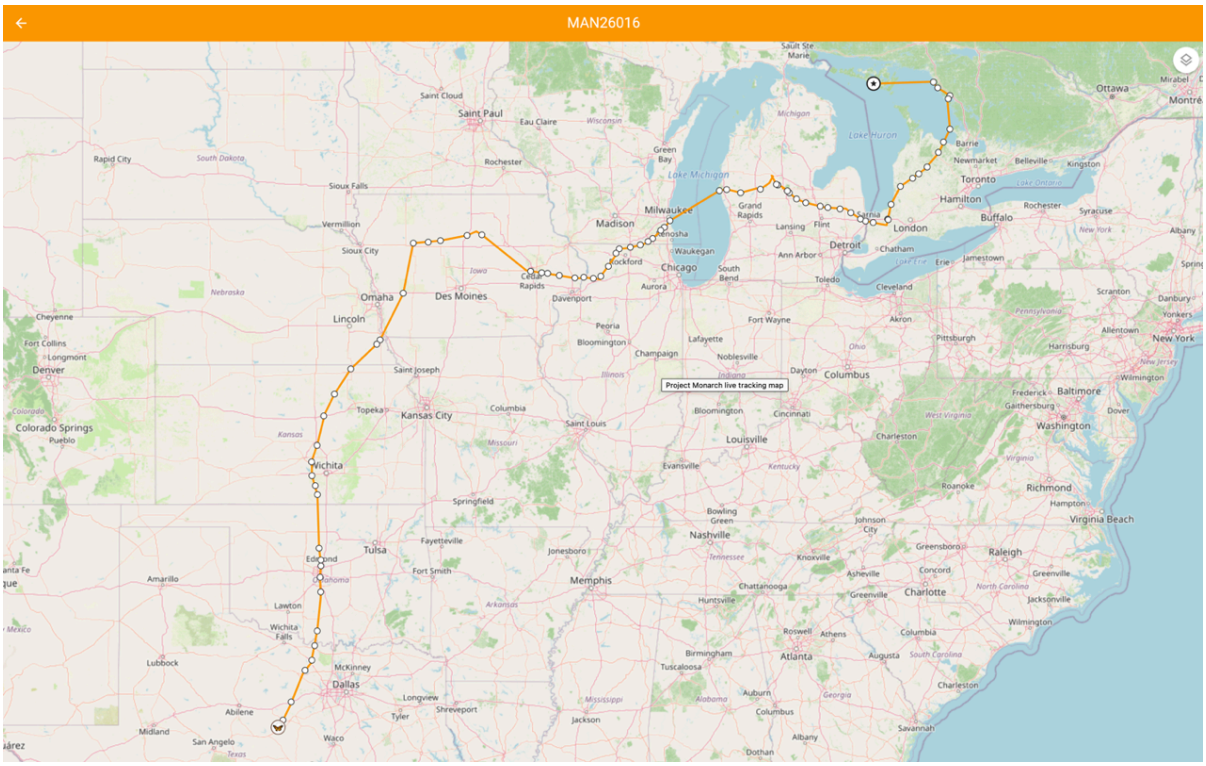
I was surprised by the high number of the Manitoulin Island monarchs that crossed either Lake Huron or Lake Michigan or both. From reading about monarchs, I knew that they crossed Lake Erie during fall migration, but I had not come across any studies documenting that they cross either Lake Huron or Lake Michigan. Certain weather conditions, like high winds, could explain the displacement of monarchs over long distances, including across large bodies of water. Not having followed the weather in late August/early September with monarch migration in mind, I

can only assume that we had such weather conditions this fall. Here are examples of the routes taken by some of these monarchs.

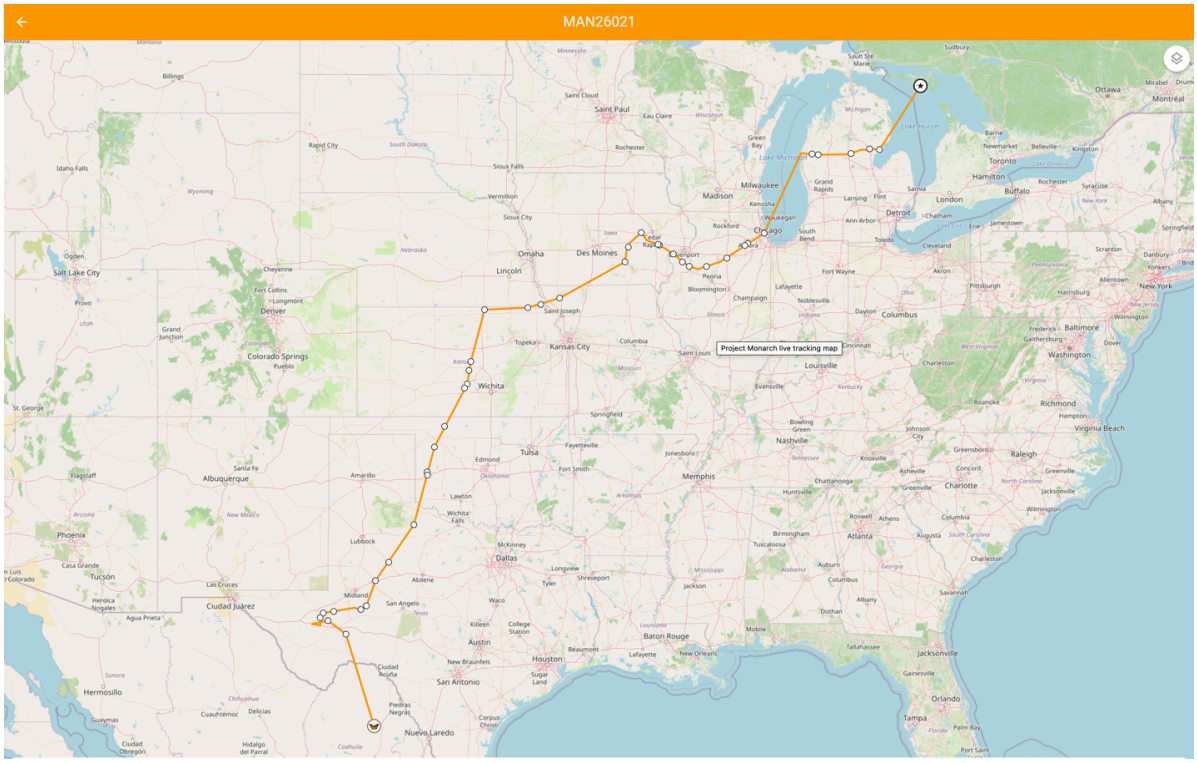
MAN26003



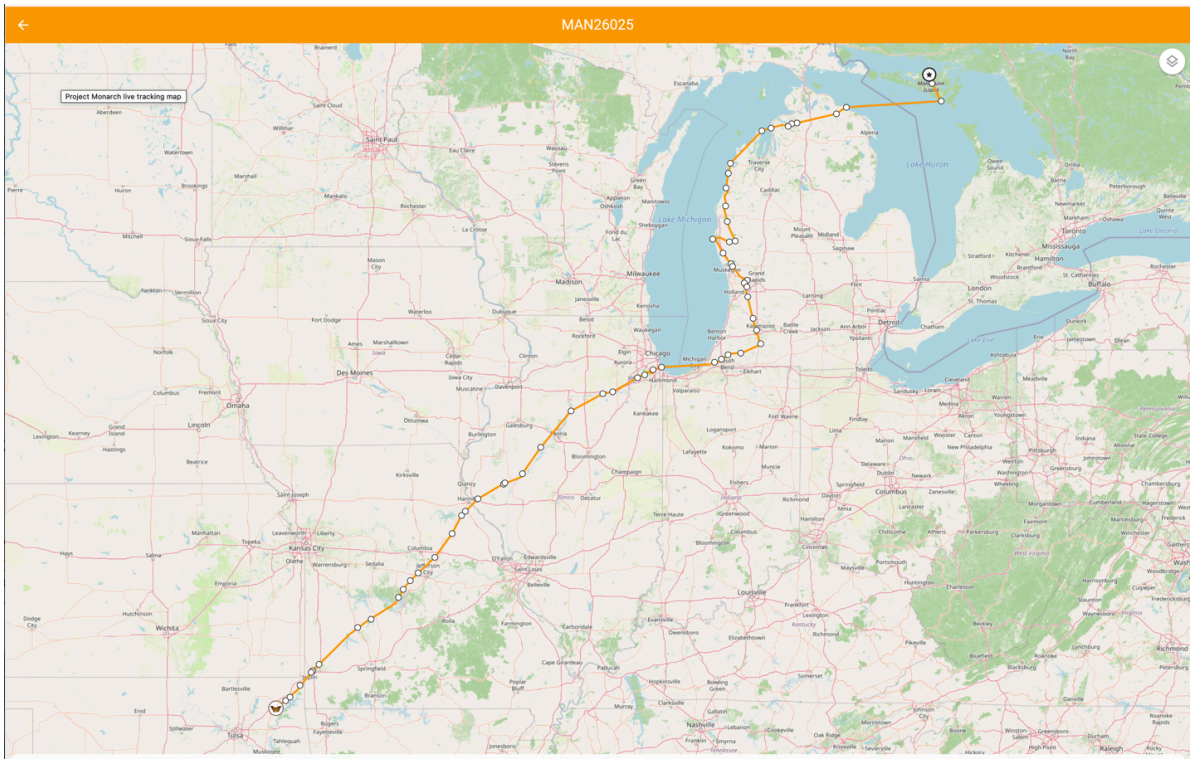
MAN26016



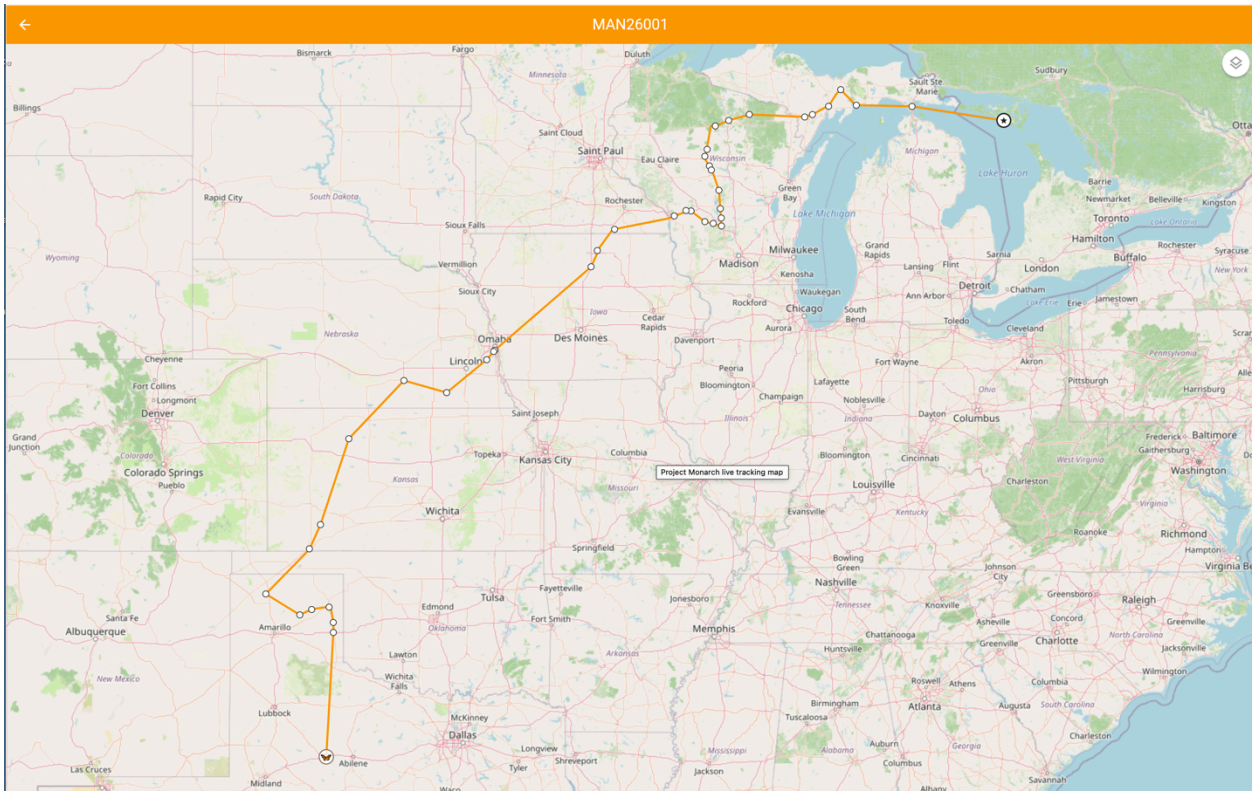
MAN26021



MAN26025

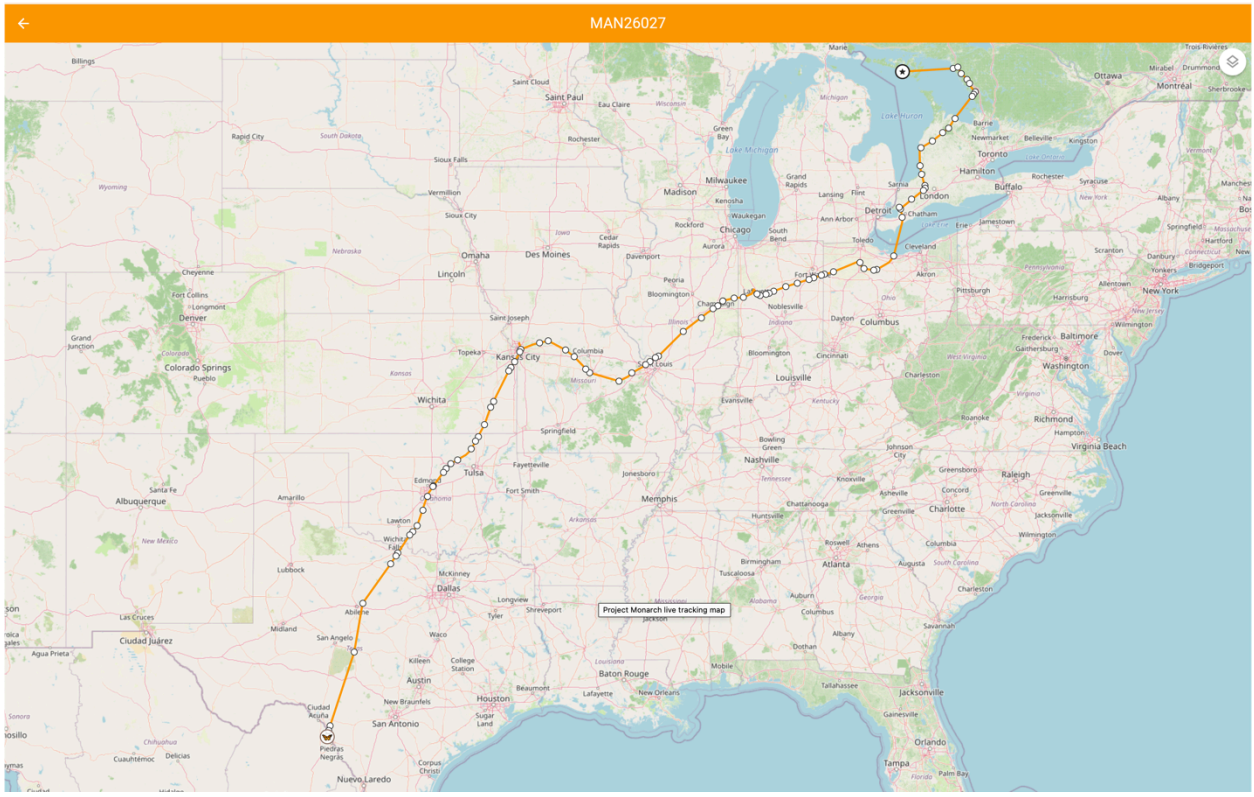


Several other monarchs had detections in the upper peninsula more or less west of Manitoulin Island, and, like the ones that crossed Lake Huron and/or Lake Michigan, would have been affected by the same weather conditions. Monarch **MAN26001** is an example.



And then there is the rogue monarch that took a completely different route. It moved east first, across the Georgian Bay. It then skirted the bay, only to cross the bay again, this time on a southwesterly track. From there it headed overland until it reached the western end of Lake Erie, which it crossed. The distances across the open water of the Georgian Bay were shorter than across Lake Huron or Lake Michigan, but still substantial. A shorter overall route, and one with only a short hop across open water, would be from Manitoulin Island to the Bruce Peninsula, the route I would have predicted before this fall and the findings from this radio-tagging project. On the next page is the route taken by **MAN26027**.

Two of the Manitoulin Island monarchs, **MAN26021** and **MAN26027**, crossed into Mexico as of October 17, 2026. Both are females. **MAN26021** is in the lead after having crossed two of the Great Lakes, Huron and Michigan, and two borders, Canada to the US and the US to Mexico. Will either or both make it to one of the overwintering sanctuaries? Many dangerous miles still lie ahead.



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



Visit Michigan Flora for the answer!

(photo by Ilse Gebhard)

Community Events of Interest

Monday, November 16, 7pm. Michigan Botanical Society Program: "Sibley Prairie," 2708 Wood Hall, Western Michigan University. Visit event web page.

Wednesday, November 18, 5:30–7 pm. SWMLC Seed Cleaning Workday, SWMLC Office, Galesburg. Registration required. Visit event web page.

Thursday, November 19, 7pm. Pints and Native Plants, Brewery Outré. Visit event web page.

Saturday, November 21, 2–3 pm. Science Speaks: Restoration Ecology, with WMU Professor Kathryn Docherty, Kalamazoo Nature Center. (Note that Professor Docherty will also give a presentation at KAWO's monthly program in December.) Visit event web page.

Saturday, November 21, 2:30–4 pm. SWMLC Hike, "All About Oaks," Wolf Tree Nature Trails. Registration required. Visit event web page.

Mondays, November 30–January 18, 11am–4pm. Seed Cleaning Drop-In, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. Visit the PCCI event calendar.

Wednesday, December 2, 6:30–8pm. KAWO monthly program: "Native Plants as Restoration Tools for Healthier Soils," with WMU Professor Kathryn Docherty, Portage District Library. Visit event web page.

Saturday, December 5, 2–4:30 pm. SWMLC Program, "Oak Gall Hike and Ink Workshop," SWMLC Office, Galesburg. Registration required. Visit event web page.

Sunday, December 13, 10am–12pm. Volunteer Workday, Kleinstuck Preserve. Visit event web page.

Thursday, December 17, 7pm. Pints and Native Plants, Brewery Outré. 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 January. Submission deadline is December 20.

Find more information and news on our website or Facebook page.

To read past newsletters, visit the archive. Visit this web page to join Wild Ones.