

Have you noticed the spreading, beautiful blooms of lavender, pink and white on the roadsides the past few weeks? A look past the petals may change your mind. After all, we all know the world is full of examples of surface beauty that masks deep trouble.

The vegetative makeup of our property has changed dramatically in our 21 years here. In fact, if you own property with wild growth, your particular vegetative makeup has probably gone through a similar metamorphosis - or worse.

Throughout much of the Midwest, Michigan, and locally, the past ten years has seen a remarkable and ecologically-frightening surge of aggressively colonizing, invasive alien plant species. The list of them is short. Everyone can learn to identify each in a single lesson. However, this handful, in many areas, is becoming the dominant vegetation on roadsides and in woodlots at the expense of a wide diversity of mostly-native plant life. A specific plant, shrub or tree is often the only food for a specific butterfly larva or other insect. Herbivorous mammals, like deer, rabbits, woodchucks, voles and more, are familiar with the smells and tastes of the vegetation that has existed on the landscape for centuries. They won't touch these newcomers. Good luck finding so much as a notch taken out of a single leaf of the invading plants. Three words sum up the core what amounts to a botanical wildfire. *Nothing eats them!*

Over the past few weeks, a number of local organizations have attempted to mobilize volunteers to help clear Garlic Mustard from nature centers and other natural areas. This biennial blooms late April through May and goes to seed in June. It can grow up to four feet tall and has toothed, heart-shaped leaves with clusters of small, four-petaled, white flowers.

Every resident should be diligent not just toward Garlic Mustard, but toward a newer arrival to the area in the past several years - Dame's Rocket, another four-petaled mustard, not just on your immediate property, but on roadsides near your house. Roads are their ultimate dispersal agent. The copious release of seeds is blown and pushed down the road by passing cars and, in the winter, snowplows. Patches on roadsides then rapidly spread off-road into all adjacent woods and natural growth.



*Dame's Rocket, like all mustards, bears four-petaled flowers. It is easy to identify among other vegetation while it blooms.*

Garlic Mustard is done blooming by late May. Dame's Rocket is now late in its blooming cycle, too. In another couple of weeks, its lavender, pink or white blooms will be gone. Don't call it *phlox*! Phlox flowers bear five petals. (Also, be sure to spare another five-petaled, native, magenta-colored wildflower that may be occupying the same shaded ditches - Wild Geranium.) All mustards produce loose clusters of thin green finger-like seed pods that curl skyward at the top of the plant. When the pods dry and crack open in another month, one large plant may drop over a thousand seeds.

So far, no Dame's Rocket exists on our property. However, it can be found just a quarter mile down the road in either direction. It grows no closer than that because I am all over the "satellite" plants as soon as any bloom anywhere close to our driveway.

Before you decide to take on a sea of Garlic Mustard or Dame's Rocket, always keep this in mind. A first plant or two needs to grow before the inevitable explosion occurs a couple of years later. Recognize these satellite plants and be sure to take a few seconds to pull them. One plant pulled today saves pulling hundreds or thousands on the site years from now. I routinely jump out of my car on shoulders and at stop signs in an instant to yank a few, but I can't do it alone. The satellites are everywhere.

Society has been slow to recognize the Dame's Rocket, as well as the broader alien invasives problem. This needs to be mainstream education, beginning, where else, but in schools! Most teachers with which I talk know little to nothing of these plants, much less their ecologically-damaging significance. They have to adhere to teaching the rigid science curricula mandated for their specific grades.

I recently walked around and through the under-utilized natural area between Williamston middle and high schools. Garlic Mustard, Dame's Rocket, and several other invasives continue to spread through these shaded spaces. They will ultimately engulf what little remains of the native woodland wildflower diversity found within. These schools have tons of manpower sitting at desks in their classrooms, plus the availability of land just outside the door to physically demonstrate this simple, ecologically-responsible, timely and critical aspect of land management. With such hands-on experience under their belts, all students could quickly recognize these plants on their properties, on neighborhood roadsides and elsewhere, then, hopefully, have the impetus to pull them.

-Jim McGrath

**SPIDERS PROGRAM Thurs, June 3, 7:30pm**  
Capital Area Audubon Society's June meeting takes place in the basement of Fenner Nature Center (2020 E. Mt. Hope, Lansing). This Thursday's guest presenter is Dorothy McLeer. The topic, spiders!

With formidable fangs and a touch of silk, spiders are both elegant and ferocious. In Dorothy's presentation, *Welcome to My Parlor*, learn more about these eight-legged hunters and trappers of home and garden and the fascinating strategies and adaptations they employ to locate, subdue, and devour their prey.

Dorothy is presently the program coordinator and an interpretive naturalist at the University of Michigan – Dearborn Environmental Interpretive Center, where she has worked for the past seventeen years. She is also a certified interpretive guide and trainer through the National Association of Interpreters.

The evening includes an ICE CREAM SOCIAL. Bring a friend and pack your sweet tooth. Doors and ice cream boxes open at 7. This event is open to the public and ice cream and all is FREE!

Jim is the editor of CAAS's newsletter, the *Call Note*. If you would like to receive the June issue by email, contact us.



*Jim photographed this female Six-spotted Fishing Spider resting on the surface of Nature Discovery's vernal pond.*

# ***DON'T FORGET... Enroll in Our Summer Day Camps & Field Trips Now. Rosters are Filling Up!***

*Here is a list of this summer's offerings. Check Nature Discovery's website ([www.naturediscovery.net](http://www.naturediscovery.net)) for details of each camp week. The number of spaces available as of June 1 are shown in parentheses.*

*June 21-24 Field Birding - 10 yrs & up (0)  
June 28-July 1 Nature Discovery – 7-8 yrs (6)  
July 6-9 Biodiversity Day Trips – ms/hs (1)  
July 19-22 “Bugging” Naturalists – 5-6 yrs (7)  
July 26-29 Budding Naturalists – 5-6 yrs (2)  
Aug 2-5 MI Reptiles & Amphibians – 8-10 yrs (2)  
Aug 9-12 Nature Discovery – 7-8 yrs (7)  
Aug 23-26 Advanced Entomology – 11 & up (1)*



## **JUNE PROGRAMS AROUND THE STATE**

*Here is a list of programs that will be offered by Nature Discovery at various other facilities around the state. Most do not have an entry fee, but check with the facility to make sure. Are you going to be near one of these locations on the date shown? If so, consider attending. Do you know someone who lives in the vicinity of one of these facilities? Pass the word!*



*Fri, June 11, 2-3:30pm. **Chelsea District Library** –  
Reptiles & Amphibians of Michigan Wetlands  
Sat, June 19, 2-3:30pm. **Albion District Library** –  
Reptiles & Amphibians of Michigan Wetlands  
Tue, June 22, 11am-1pm. **Coldwater Library** –  
Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit  
Wed, June 23, 2-3:30pm. **Paw Paw District Library**  
- Reptiles & Amphibians of Michigan Wetlands  
Thur, June 24, 6-7:30pm. **Brandon Twp Library**  
(Ortonville) - Reptiles & Amphibians of  
Michigan Wetlands (Teens); 7:30-8:30pm. Sights  
& Sounds of Michigan Wetlands (Adults)  
Sat, June 26, 8-11am. **Mitchell State Park**  
(Cadillac) – Birding By Ear Presentation & Hike*

*The Mourning Warbler is one of many colorful, but often overlooked, warblers that breed in northern Michigan. Learning to bird “by ear” greatly enhances your ability to see them. ©Bill Norton*

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**NATURE DISCOVERY 5900 N. Williamston Road Williamston, MI 48895**

**(517) 655-5349**

**[naturedisc@cablespeed.com](mailto:naturedisc@cablespeed.com)**