

If you caught our last newsletter, you know we've had a "luna farm" operating for over a month, now. The promise of giving caterpillars away to participants at our September 12 program helped us well-surpass our previous attendance numbers. About 60 people showed up for *Finding & Rearing Giant Silk Moths*. They learned about various species of these huge, beautiful moths in Michigan, including the luna, their life histories, why their numbers have declined, and how to rear them in captivity. Each participant went home with at least two larvae and some hickory leaves packed in a puffed-up, zip-lock baggie, along with a detailed care sheet. Many others picked some up for a small donation at other times. I also gave lessons at Montessori Children's House (Lansing) and Stepping Stones Montessori (East Lansing), left lunas in the classrooms for them to nurture and observe, and arranged for all older elementary students to each take a caterpillar home to rear.

We started September with nearly 300 tiny larvae packed in a few jars of leaves that I needed to clean out and "releaf" each day. Through the middle of the month we sent a lot of them to new homes. The numbers may have dwindled, but the amount of leaves - then whole branches - I needed to cut every day (for awhile, *twice* a day) reached a ridiculous plateau. Although I was down to only half the caterpillars I started with, each individual was consuming several whole leaves a day.

Over Labor Day weekend, I began to notice these roving, irritating rashes on my skin everywhere on my body. I've become fairly sensitive over the years to poison ivy and wondered if I had inadvertently gotten into some on one of my frequent off-trail endeavors, but the telltale advance to weeping blisters never materialized. The itching reached a point where it was starting to affect my sleep. I put up with it for another week. Then, one morning, as I lopped branches off the hickory on our driveway, the realization hit me that my symptoms were synonymous with September's continuous, daily hickory harvest.



I visited the Haslett Redi Care last week, almost certain of the diagnosis. After showing the doctor the rashes, he immediately asked if I could pinpoint any new exposure to a plant or other organic thing since the rash developed. Well, duuuuh! "Here's a story you haven't heard," I said, and explained the farm. The accompanying nurse lit up. "That is *sooo* cool! Can I get one to raise?" I pulled a brochure out of my pocket. The doc explained that my constant exposure to the hickory resins had most certainly blown me beyond some sensitivity threshold that any normal passing exposure would never come close to. "Don't be surprised," he said, "if you remain highly-sensitive to even minor exposure to it in the future." Hmmm. Hickory-poisoning... A shot in the hip, and I was out the door to pick up my prednisone scrip.

I'm covered now. No, I mean *covered*. Latex gloves and long sleeves. The itching has stopped, but, should this highly popular program turn into an annual thing, having to adopt these extra preventive measures just complicated the operation a little bit more.

-Jim McGrath

There's still time to raise your own LUNA MOTH Caterpillar!

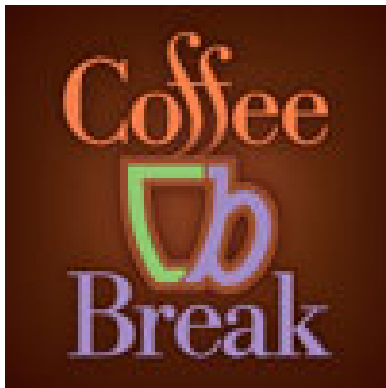
The last of them should be spinning cocoons within the week. Teachers, parents or interested students of any age are encouraged to try it. We'll supply a two-page care sheet and any other natural support you may need along the way. All we ask is a small donation in exchange for this unique opportunity.



Adriane Collins cradles thirteen maximum-sized, 5th instar luna caterpillars. These are just days away from spinning cocoons. They will remain inside in their pupal form until June. Adriane is our newest staff member.



Catch Nature Discovery on LCC Radio Thursday Morning



*Jim will be a guest on **The Coffee Break Morning Show** to discuss Sunday's Celebrate Michigan Snakes event (see next page). Jim will have a few live snakes on hand to show to hosts Jack Robbins and Karen Love.*

You can listen to Coffee Break each weekday morning 9am - 10am on 89.7 FM, and also catch it on Comcast 15 or 31. Jim's Thursday, October 7 time slot is tentatively scheduled for 9:30am. Tune in!

Did You Know... that Nature Discovery teaches weekly Michigan wildlife/nature lessons at two area Montessori schools? Contact **Montessori Children's House** (Lansing, 517.482.9191) or **Stepping Stones Montessori** (E. Lansing, 517.336.0422) to find out how these lessons impact the lives of the students, and to arrange for an observational visit.

"Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire." -W.B. Yeats

Second Sunday
10.10.10
CELEBRATE
Michigan
Snakes
DAY



Join us on Sunday, October 10, any time from 1 to 5pm, for **Celebrate Michigan Snakes Day**. Love 'em or loathe 'em, no matter how you feel about snakes, it's sure to be a highly experiential and enlightening afternoon for all ages. A **\$3/person** donation is requested.

Do you know someone who is afraid of, dislikes, hates, or otherwise has uncomfortable feelings toward snakes? Try to coax them into coming. We **GUARANTEE** that anyone who attends this informative and completely benign event will walk away feeling better about snakes! Here are some details...

At 2pm, using live Michigan specimens, we will present ***Facts Over Fear: Things Everyone Should Know About Snakes***. We'll discuss a host of erroneous beliefs, spread like a contagion through society, that produce unwarranted, bad feelings toward these surprisingly gentle reptiles. Will a snake bite? Will a snake chase you? Are snakes slimy? Do snakes have fangs? Can a snake sense fear? One question after another produces a factual explanation that sheds light on the unthreatening reality of these needlessly-persecuted creatures. We'll also discuss fascinating aspects of snake anatomy and ecology, as well as their increasing struggle to survive in our world.



Meet 13 species of Michigan snakes at our center. Learn how to identify one from another. We'll take many of them out of their tanks for close inspection. Watch a **snake climb a tree**. See **snakes eating** worms, fish and frogs. Lots of **snake-handling** opportunities, too. Well snap a **digital picture of you holding a snake**, then email it to you.

Visit with the rest of our huge collection of live Michigan turtles, frogs and salamanders. Walk the trail out back. Our staff is always on-hand to help you make the most of your experience here. Then, stay for a **hot dog grill-out** at 4:30 (only \$2/person).

Hands-On Home School Opportunities



On October 11, we will be presenting two hour-long programs for an Ann Arbor-area home school network. Nature Discovery can bring one-time programs or schedule regular classes for any ages on a huge array of Michigan natural science topics, physical science and chemistry to any home school venue. We can make arrangements with any size audience – even individual families – sometimes on short notice. Want to get together tomorrow? Call us. We might be available! We also host field trips to Nature Discovery. Contact us to discuss the possibilities!



*Know someone in
Mt. Pleasant or in Flint who may
like to catch our program?*

Jim will be presenting *Michigan Snakes Alive* at **Chippewa Valley Audubon Society's** monthly meeting, **Wednesday, October 13** at 7pm. Entry is free. For the meeting location or other details, contact Mike LeValley at 989.400.5076 or email mike.levalley@mi.usda.gov.

On **Sunday, October 24**, from 12 to 4pm, **Flint Children's Museum** will host our Live Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit as part of a Halloween event. For more information, visit www.flintchildrensmuseum.org.

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