

THIS ISSUE

All About Woolly Bears, Sun, October 16
Good Luck, Adriane
Around the State in October

Good Poke, Bad Poke

I try to be tolerant of any native growth on our acreage. I'm even more likely to tolerate an otherwise troublesome native plant if I can readily see its benefit to birds or other wildlife, but sometimes exceptions just have to be made. Poison ivy comes to mind. I've seen numerous bird species chowing on poison ivy berries in late fall or winter, but... Come on, it's poison ivy! Anyone who has a high degree of sensitivity to contact with it has to be excused.

But, every time I pull a poke, I can't help but feel a twinge of guilt. While this native perennial with large leaves and a deep-magenta stalk and stems is not poisonous to touch, its root is highly toxic for mammals to ingest. The stem and fruits too, but to a lesser degree. So, just as with the unchecked spread through our woodlands of non-native invasives like garlic mustard, dame's rocket and Amur honeysuckle, don't expect help from the neighborhood deer and rabbits.

However, in October, birds of many species go crazy for poke's glossy, purplish black berries. I probably see robins dining on them more than any other species, but I've seen cedar waxwings, bluebirds, catbirds, orioles and even downy and red-bellied woodpeckers trying them, too.

Several falls ago, I noticed a multi-species feeding frenzy taking place on the berries of an especially large poke that has been growing – and growing, on the edge of our compost pile. Grabbing my binoculars, camera and a lawn chair, they allowed me to sidle to within fifteen feet of the action without disturbing their dining. I sat, watched and snapped for over thirty minutes before my schedule forced me to reluctantly depart.



By October a poke can get large and messy.



A robin stops to search for leftovers in a large poke nearly stripped of its berries by previous diners.

Poke would be more tolerable if it didn't get so huge over the course of a summer. As many as twelve or fifteen stalks may grow from a single root. As the stalks desiccate and become weighted with berries, they droop and collapse, turning the poke into a large, messy, red and green vegetative lump, sometimes more than ten feet

across. Oh, and the plant has a tap root that, if left unchecked will grow into Carrotzilla within a few years. If you are planning to dig to remove one, get ready to displace a lot of dirt. A several-year-old poke tap root can extend five feet deep or more and takes on the dense, woody character of a tree trunk.

We find small pokes growing randomly all over our six acres and quite a few more that have morphed into the monsters described above. Not surprising, with so many berry-loving birds dropping the seeds out their back sides. This naturalist's advice? Allow one or two to grow in a convenient location, taking aesthetics and great fall bird-viewing into consideration. It has its rewards for everyone. As for the rest, to save time, frustration, and your back, dig 'em up while they're young!

-Jim McGrath

Open Hours...

***Sunday, October 16
1 to 5pm, \$5/person***

What's Up With Wooly Bears?



Every October, especially when the sun's rays warm the ground, Wooly Bears are on the move, their bristly chestnut-and-black bodies hurrying across roads and sidewalks. Nearly everyone seems to know of them, yet, very few seem to know anything about them. Where did they come from and where are they going? What are the other stages of their life cycles? What do they eat? What happens to them when it gets cold? Can their black and brown bands really predict the severity of the coming winter?



The Giant Leopard Moth larva shows rings of red skin when it curls up.

At 2pm, attend *What's Up With Wooly Bears?* Learn about the life cycle, behavior and ecology of one of our most recognized native caterpillars. The presentation includes beautiful Powerpoint images, live specimens and more. Participants will also meet other members of the Tiger Moth family, including the Wooly Bear's larger, more impressive, but less common cousin, the Giant Leopard Moth larva. Learn how to successfully rear larvae at home or in the classroom. Learn about a simple scientific investigative experiment that can be conducted with the use of only a handful of caterpillars. We'll have a limited number of larvae on hand for participants to take to rear (or just pick up your own). Written care sheets are available, too!

Did you know that juice from poke berries (see column above) was used as a natural dye by Native Americans and as ink during the Civil War? Participants of all ages can try their hands at dyeing and writing with it. Bring your own T-shirt and make a dye-design if you'd like!

Also, lots to do with our huge zoo of Michigan snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders. Take a guided walk on the trails. Refreshments available, too!



Adriane kayaks through habitat of the declining Mink Frog at the edge of Straits Lake in the Upper Peninsula.

Thank You & Good Luck, Adriane!

Adriane Collins, an outstanding volunteer and employee for us over the past year, has moved on. She worked a couple of days each week toiling in the critical, but largely unglamorous role of zookeeper for our 100-plus animals. The way she went about all aspects of feeding, cleaning, and, if necessary, nurturing the turtles, frogs and snakes, made it obvious that she genuinely cared about the well-being of each and every one.

With a degree in zoology, working with us was her first opportunity to put her education to use. As is the case with many people when it comes to public speaking, Adriane was initially reluctant to speak with visitors at our center and audience members at our programs. Over time, as she became more comfortable with the subject matter and exposure to audiences, it was gratifying to watch her confidence and interpretive skills grow. We wish you the best in your future endeavors, Adriane!

Around the State in October

- ❖ ***Saturday, October 8: 10:30am. Michigan Turtles presentation; Fremont District Library.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, October 8: 12-2pm. Michigan Wildlife Exhibit; Michigan Alliance for Environmental & Outdoor Education Conference, Delta College, Bay City.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, October 22: 11am-3pm. Michigan Reptiles Exhibit; Leila Arboretum, Battle Creek.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, October 29: 11am-4pm. Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit; Flint Children's Museum.***

This Buckeye emerged from the chrysalis shown in our previous issue. Correction: In the September issue, I mentioned incorrectly that the Buckeye overwinters in the adult stage. While many closely-related species do, the Buckeye, like the Painted Lady, cannot survive the winter here in any metamorphic stage. Each summer, individuals from southern populations wander northward to breed in Michigan. Their descendants, like the individual here, are doomed to perish.

-JM



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