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The Common Milkweed

Prolific, fragrant, and vital

IMITATION IS THE BEST FORM OF PROTECTION

by
Arlene Westhoven, GRNA naturalist

Animals have several kinds of defenses based on imitation. Katydid use camouflage to blend in with their vegetation environment. Birds, such as mockingbirds and starlings, imitate the calls of other birds and even human speech, which give them greater possibilities for communication. Insects, including butterflies and moths, have an adaption called mimicry - imitating other species in color.

A few weeks ago, I was watching our milkweed plants at Grass River Natural Area because their fragrant blossoms were at just the right stage to attract a Monarch Butterfly. Sure enough, a bright Monarch hovered and landed on one of the drooping flower clusters. A few days later I noticed tiny striped larvae that grew rapidly as they munched the leaves.

I was reminded of a Monarch mimic, the Viceroy Butterfly. A timely example of this may be found in the two pictures below. One is a Monarch Butterfly, the other a Viceroy Butterfly. Can you identify which is which?



Let's discuss the similarities.

1. Both are orange with black bodies, black wing veins and black wing borders with white spots.
2. Both taste bitter to a predator. The predator is deterred from tasting the butterfly because if it tastes one butterfly, the acrid taste will deter the attacker from trying others.

What are the differences?

1. Notice the black horizontal vein extending across the back wing of the Viceroy. It is missing in the Monarch.
2. The Viceroy is slightly smaller than the Monarch, which is more noticeable if you see the two species together.
3. The Monarch feeds on milkweed, the Viceroy primarily on willow. Both plants result in a bitter tasting insect.

Now you should be able to tell that the Monarch is on the left and the Viceroy on the right.

Originally it was thought that only the Monarch tasted bitter, and since both were orange, a predator would avoid not only the Monarch, but the similarly orange Viceroy. However, German naturalist Fritz Müller has since discovered that both butterflies taste bitter. It is the ORANGE COLOR that deters a predator. This may be likened to our red traffic signal which means 'STOP'. Poison Arrow Frogs also use bright colors as a warning signal.

Amazing nature! The more we observe and learn about these creatures, the more interesting they become and the more curious we are.

ROVING NATURALIST SCHEDULE AT GRNA

The schedule for this week and next is:

Tuesday, July 21

10:30 am - 1:30 pm
GRNA Intern Kyla Foley
Michigan rocks and fossils

Thursday, July 23
10:30 am - 1:30 pm
Naturalist Arlene Westhoven
Program - Nature games and drawing - perfect for families

Tuesday, July 28
10:30 am - 1:30 pm
Naturalist Emily Burke
Program - Mammal Tracking

Thursday, July 30
10:30 am - 1:30 pm
Naturalist Emily Burke
Program - Ferns of GRNA

The Roving Naturalist can be found near the cabin on Finch Creek. Please observe physical distancing as you interact with the naturalist and others.

Watch the newsletter and calendar on the website for added programs.

ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT FOR GRNA **Adopted by GRNA Board of Directors**

Grass River Natural Area has long been a place for all people to enjoy and experience. The events happening around the world, however, strongly encouraged our Board and staff to reflect on what this really means for our organization. What are WE doing to be part of the solution to make all people feel welcomed and safe at GRNA? After much discussion and reflection, a special committee of staff and Board members was formed. What follows is the start of our work to learn and grow as we become an even more inclusive organization.

In nature, diversity is the primary marker of a healthy ecosystem. Diversity is the main predictor of landscape resilience in the face of disturbances like natural disasters, climactic swings, and nonnative species invasions. Just as we do in our natural spaces, Grass River Natural Area, Inc. (GRNA) celebrates and encourages diversity in our community.

We stand with our environmental peers around the country and condemn racism in any form. As the recent tragedies highlight, there is much work to be done to overcome the intolerance and biases that affect so many in our country. GRNA strives to cultivate a community of belonging that is welcoming and accessible. We believe everyone benefits when people have equitable access to natural places and spaces for education, recreation, and renewal.

GRNA joins this collective voice in calling for change. We want all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, economic status, religion, or sexual orientation to feel welcome and safe at GRNA. There is certainly more that needs to be done and that begins with difficult conversations, education, and a willingness to listen and understand. Our work to be part of the solution has begun through learning, reflection, and discussions with our board and staff and a review of

organizational messaging and policies. We commit to this work as individuals, as a team, and as an organization. Grass River Natural Area is a space where all are welcome and valued equally.

Adopted July 15, 2020



GRASS RIVER GATHERING CHERRY REPUBLIC GLEN ARBOR

Come join GRNA staff and volunteers for good food, drinks, live music, and conversation at Cherry Republic's pub in Glen Arbor.

Plenty of outdoor seating is available and there is a new outdoor bar! A percentage of total sales from the evening will go to GRNA. Stop by anytime during the 3-hour window. There will be activities for kids, so bring the whole family. Physical distancing will be enforced.

Friday,
July 24
4:00 - 7:00 pm





ANTRIM COUNTY WANTS YOUR INPUT!

Antrim County is updating its *Community Park and Recreation Plan* and they need your help. If you care about the future of the parks and recreation facilities in Antrim County, please share your thoughts with them. Take the survey directly by [clicking here](#), or visit www.antrimcounty.org before July 31, 2020.

WHERE THE WILDFLOWERS GROW

You can now register for a group Blooms and Birds; Wildflower Walk with Julie and Phil to view GRNA wildflowers and watch for our birds. The cost per person is \$5 and you must reserve in advance. The group must be comfortable physical distancing with each other. Please call the Grass River Center at 231.533.8576 if you have questions or wish to reserve.

Education Director James Dake also compiled a wonderful Self-guided Wildflower Walk Brochure that can be picked up at the Grass River Center. You can enjoy the splendor of our blooms whenever and however you like. You can also download it [here](#) and wander wherever you like. A new full color trail map is also available.



CONSIDER A DONATION

Our financial well being is dependent on programming dollars and donations, and with the former sidelined for the most part at the moment, donations are of paramount importance. Your generous support is always greatly appreciated, but in these difficult days, your willingness to help us continue our mission with a personal donation promotes you to Nature Warrior status at GRNA.

Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-one years because of the generous support of people who value our mission "to manage the Grass River Natural Area, conserve and protect its watershed, and provide opportunities that increase knowledge, appreciation and community-wide stewardship of the natural environment".

If you believe in our mission and want to help us fulfill it for many years to come, please click on the Donate button below. Your support is greatly appreciated.

DONATE



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