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# SPRING IS POPPING

## PLANTS, POLLINATORS, & PROGRAMS

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### IT'S THE BEE'S KNEES AT GRASS RIVER NATURAL AREA

by

Arlene Westhoven, Naturalist at GRNA

We ended Earth Week at Grass River by planting wildflower seeds along the entry road. The Antrim Conservation District supplied the seed packets of native wildflowers for our visitors. Staff and volunteers prepared the soil and supervised the planting. I mention this because the blooms will make the road beautiful, and they will attract pollinators. Pollinators, such as bees, flies, hummingbirds, butterflies, moths, and bats are important for the transfer of pollen from one plant to another of the same species. Fruit trees, berries, beans, and many decorative plants benefit from cross-pollination by flying creatures.

Honeybees are the best known of the pollinators because they produce and store honey in wax 'combs' from one season to the next. Beekeepers supply extra food and harvest the honey which is commercially important.



We rarely think of bumblebees as pollinators because their lifestyle is so different, and they don't store honey in the way honeybees do, which makes them commercially unimportant. Yet, bumblebees are important and unique pollinators.

The *Old Farmer's Almanac* lists several characteristics which



make bumblebees good pollinators:

- They are large fuzzy insects that eat pollen.
- They can gather more pollen than honeybees because of a longer proboscis which can reach deeper into flowers to

collect pollen.

- The genus name for bumblebee is *Bombus*, which, to me, resembles its behavior of beating its wings and shaking the pollen onto its fluffy surface. Bumblebees can beat their wings 130 times/second.

Bumblebees harvest only enough honey to sustain them for a short time, so it's important for them to have blooming flowers from early in the spring to the late fall. The worker bees die in the fall, leaving the queen to hibernate and start a new colony in the spring. Bumblebees do not build hives as such. They colonize unused holes in or near the ground abandoned by other creatures, such as squirrels or mice; crevices in stone walls; or cavities in trees.

Only female bumblebees sting, and they can sting multiple times. They are, however, docile and only sting if really disturbed by perceived threats to their underground nest. Because they don't swarm, you will not be attacked by a Bumble Rumble if you come too close to the nest hole. But as the season goes along, grasses can overgrow the area, so it's best to look for bumblebees' nests early in the season.

Bumblebees are active early in the day and through evening. They have a longer day than honeybees because they warm up early in the morning. To a degree, Bumblebees can regulate their body temperature by "bumbling" around to get their "motors" going. Because of their 'fuzzy' insulation, they have a longer day and season as they can be active in dimmer light and at cooler temperatures. This longer activity cycle is a second reason for planting species of wildflowers that bloom early and a succession of species that bloom throughout the spring, summer, and into fall.

Unfortunately, all bee populations face problems. Honeybees are not native. They were introduced to the U.S. as a commercial venture because of their honey production. As is usual, threats to commerce alert us to threats to all bees, including our native Bumblebees. One of these threats is hive collapse which causes a hive to be abandoned, usually noticed in “domesticated” bees because of the loss of revenue. This phenomenon has not been explained.

The following are other threats to bees that we do understand and can take measures to decrease or prevent:

1. Introduction of non-native blooming plants. Bee species are quite specific when it comes to harvesting pollen. Unfortunately, blooms of non-native plants may not have the same types of signals as the familiar locals, so the bees’ efforts are wasted.
2. Introduction of competitors, such as ‘Killer’ Honeybees which out-compete native bees. These “designer” bees were introduced into the country and, because they reproduce so rapidly, they out-compete native pollinators.
3. Parasites, such as hive mites, which are also imports. They are a great problem for commercial honey producers.
4. Pesticides, especially neonicotinoids, are harmful to all insect pollinators. Read warning labels carefully before purchasing or using any pesticide.

There are several cues which attract specific pollinators - honey and nectar, color, petal arrangement, and fragrance. The more cues, the more likely that pollination will take place. I have included a list of pollinators and the bloom characteristics which attract them.

NECTAR /POLLEN - These are the food source for bees, butterflies, many other insects, and bats. Some flowers, Michigan Lilies for example, have a “honeyguide”, a contrasting color pointing to the location of the pollen.



PETAL ARRANGEMENT (*Corolla*) - Flat, ray-like flowers like Ox-eye Daisies provide a landing platform where bees, butterflies, beetles, and flies can rest while feasting on the pollen.

COLOR OR COLOR CONTRAST - Hummingbirds, because they feed on the wing, prefer orange or red flowers and a tubular shape that they can spot easily. The Columbines here at GRNA are a favorite of Hummingbirds. Sphinx

Moths also feed on the wing. We used to call them baby hummingbirds when we were kids.



**FRAGRANCE** - A sweet fragrance lures moths and bats that feed at night. Some flowers, such as Evening Primrose, only bloom in the evening. Others are only fragrant at night. The odor of rotting meat tricks House Flies and Carrion Beetles. The odor of the drowned insects in the vase of Pitcher Plants attracts these insects to the bloom on a stalk above the trap.

I hope you've enjoyed this little tour of the relationships between native plants and pollinators. Please plant wildflowers and protect all pollinators, especially the friendly Bumblebees.

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## SPRING FLING AT DOCKSIDE

**Thank you** to everyone who ordered take-out or dined with us at the Dockside Torch Lake on Tuesday, May 4. The weather felt more like March, but the warm company made up for the chilly temperatures and brisk wind that kept us inside. If you didn't stop by, you missed an appearance by our new otter mascot. She was an instant hit with the youngest attendees who immediately invented a new game - Jump the Otter Tail! We hope to see her at many events in the future!



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## PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON

**Blooms & Birds Wildflower Walks**

**Weekly on Tuesdays at 10:00 am through September**

**Free, donations appreciated**



Go for a relaxing stroll on the trails with GRNA docents Julie Hurd and Phil Jarvi each week to find and identify the beautiful and unique wildflowers at Grass River. Along the way we will listen and look for the birds that call Grass River home.



### **Spring Stewardship Day**

**Saturday, May 22, 2021, 9:00 am – noon**

**Free**

At Grass River Natural Area, it is time to give the trails a good trimming, spruce up the gardens, and shine up some windows. Come one, come all to help freshen up the Grass River Center and grounds in preparation for the busy summer and fall seasons! No experience is necessary, just a pair of work gloves and an open spirit. Pre-registration is encouraged. Email [stewardship@grassriver.org](mailto:stewardship@grassriver.org)



### **Volunteer Open House**

**Saturday, May 22, 2021, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm**

**Free**

If you have never volunteered with Grass River Natural Area before or want to expand your volunteering to more projects, this event is for you! GRNA will have current volunteers on the lawn outside the Grass River Center (weather permitting) at different stations representing the different types of volunteer jobs available, including stewardship, education, citizen science, events, and administration. Come anytime during the open house to learn about opportunities as diverse as maintaining the native plant gardens around the Center, assisting naturalists during school field trips, or joining one of our Board committees.



### **Butterfly Monitoring Training**

**Saturday, May 22, 2021, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm**

**Free, donations appreciated**

Kalamazoo Nature Center staff will host a virtual butterfly monitoring training on Saturday, May 22, 11am-1pm. This free program is open to past and new participants throughout the state of Michigan. Donations are welcome and will help

support MiBN's annual operating costs. Register for this online training here:

<https://naturecenter.doubleknot.com/event/butterfly-monitor-training/2806390>

*\*Grass River Natural Area is a regional hub for the Michigan Butterfly Network. An outdoor butterfly "field day" will be hosted by Grass River in June for those interested that have attended the first online training.*



### **Naturalist on the Trail**

**Fridays throughout the season, 10:00 am - 1:30 pm**

Every Friday this summer a naturalist will be stationed outdoors on our trail system offering a new mobile mini-program each week. Stop into the Grass River Center to find out where the naturalist is that day, or go find them on the trail! You can drop in any

time during the 3-hour window of the program. For all ages!



### **Grass River Natural Area Community Paddle**

**Sponsored by Paddle Antrim**

**June 3, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm**

Grab your paddleboard, kayak or paddle craft of choice and join Paddle Antrim and Grass River Natural Area for an extra special community paddle.

We are co-hosting this paddle with Paddle Antrim to explore this special place.

Grass River's naturalist will be there to share the natural history of the river. This slow paddle is scheduled for 2 hours. We will begin at Willow Day Park at 6:30 pm to check in and we will launch promptly as a group at 6:45 pm.

Paddle Antrim encourage all ages and types of paddle crafts to join us on the water for these slow paddles. This paddle will last approximately two hours on the water, is free, and no pre-registration is required. All paddlers must bring their own craft/boat, paddle, and pfd (life jacket). As with all Paddle Antrim events, pfds must be properly worn at all times. All ages are welcome but children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult out on the water.

**DIRECTIONS TO WILLOW DAY PARK:** From Bellaire, drive south on M-88 just over 2 miles to Brake Rd. Turn right on Brake Rd and drive about one mile to White Birch Lane. Turn right on White Birch Lane (it does say private road but please continue) and Willow Day Park is almost immediately on the left.

### **Grass River Native Plant Sale**

**Friday, June 4, 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm**



**Join us for this one-day sale event.**

**Native plants are incredibly important to native wildlife.**

Individual quarts of native plants will be available for sale at GRNA. They are first-come first-served until stock runs out, so arrive early if you want your pick of all the species!

*All plants are locally grown and native to Michigan. Sales from this event help to support Grass River's important conservation work, and you help local wildlife by planting native plants in your yard!*



**Kayak Grass River**

**Monday June 7, 2021, 9:00 am - 11:30 am**

**\$45 per person - includes tour, kayak, PFD, and paddle for each participant**

There is no better way to experience Grass River than by paddling its calm waters and enjoying its unique wildlife! On these morning guided tours, visitors explore Grass River by kayak and find out about GRNA's conservation efforts, wetland plants, and wildlife. Adults only. Limited to small groups, must pre-register. Call GRNA to register: 231-350-9461, or email [james@grassriver.org](mailto:james@grassriver.org). This program meets at the Grass River Center and then walks to the dock to launch kayaks. Kayaks and paddles are provided and ready for you at the dock.



**Evening River Paddle**

**Wednesday June 9, 2021, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm**

**\$35 per person - includes tour, kayak, PFD, and paddle for each participant**

There is no better way to enjoy evening than on the Grass River, paddling its calm waters and enjoying its unique wildlife! On these guided tours, visitors explore Grass River by kayak (provided) with a naturalist and find out about GRNA's conservation efforts, wetland plants, and wildlife while enjoying the evening. Adults Only. Limited to small groups, must pre-register. Call GRNA to register: 231-350-9461, or email [james@grassriver.org](mailto:james@grassriver.org). This program meets at the Grass River Center and then walks to the dock to launch kayaks. Kayaks and paddles are provided and ready for you at the dock.

**Wild Orchids and Other Rare Plants**

**Friday June 11, 2021, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

**\$10 per person, must pre-register**

Join Education Director James Dake in an exclusive presentation and off-trail expedition to see rare orchids and other amazing plants, like carnivorous pitcher



plants and sundews, in lesser known areas of GRNA. Adults only. Limited space. Must be able to hike on uneven and wet/muddy terrain for the outdoor portion. Wearing muck boots is highly recommended, as the places we go will be very wet.



### **Art on Thursdays**

**Thursday, June 17, 2021, 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm**

On select Thursdays this summer, join a naturalist for a reoccurring art program outdoors! We will explore painting, sketching, journaling, clay,

and more!



**NEW LOGO WEAR**  
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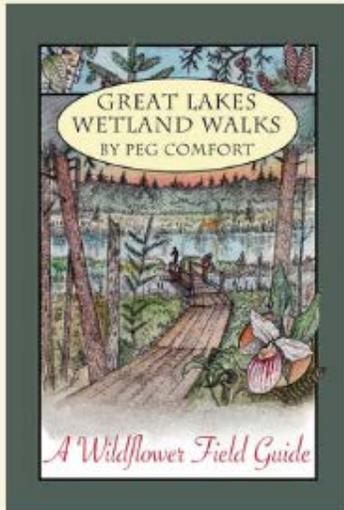
**The 2nd Edition of  
Grass River Natural Area's  
FIELD GUIDE  
to Northwest Michigan  
is now available.**



This guide is written and compiled by GRNA Education Director James Dake. It features several new and expanded sections and a new Foreword by Executive Director Jenn Wright.

Cost is \$18.87 plus tax

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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.

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