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**JOIN US FOR  
AUTUMNFEST SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22**

more information in PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON

**A HALLOWE'EN STROLL\***

**SEE RED AND STOP! AT GRASS RIVER**

by  
Arlene Westhoven  
GRNA Naturalist

Recently, while walking the Sedge Meadow Trail at Grass River Natural Area, I noticed a shrub whose leaves were bright red while the surrounding vegetation was mostly green. Opposite leaves along the stem told me immediately, DON'T TOUCH – POISON SUMAC. Poison sumac is toxic throughout the year, causing itching blisters like its relatives poison ivy and poison oak.



As I continued walking, I began to think of the poisonous organisms that are red. Of course, I also thought of ones that are not poisonous - raspberries and strawberries, for example.

Why is red considered a warning color? According to 'Dr. Google', red light has the longest wavelength of any color on the spectrum, so it is not diffused as it passes through the atmosphere. What other red organisms are toxic in one way or another?



A column of shiny red berries caught my eye. Another toxic plant whose berries look appealing is Jack-in-the-pulpit. All parts of this plant contain calcium oxalate crystals that can cause skin irritation and damage to all parts of the digestive system. Look, but don't touch or eat!

As I continued my walk, taking the Fern Trail, I noticed a beautiful fungus. Its cap was orange-red, flecked with white patches. It had a skirt around the stem whose base sat in a cup. Both stem and gills matched the white patches on the cap. It was a mushroom I had often seen in illustrations for children's books. This mushroom, fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), is toxic when ingested and should not be eaten.



Moving along the trail, I saw some bright red berries hanging from a vine-like plant. It was bittersweet nightshade, also called belladonna. A connection was made - both nightshade and tomatoes are in the family Solonaceae. Is it possible that, during historical times, the tomato was considered toxic because of its relation to nightshade?

More likely, it is because in ancient times food was served on pewter plates, and the acid in the tomatoes leached the lead out of the pewter so it was consumed by the diner.

I sat on a bench to collect my thoughts and calmly watched a spider building its radiating web. The black widow has a bright red patch in the center of its abdomen (pictured in the header). Another warning signal? I took a closer look at the spider and did not see a red spot. It was not a black widow not only because of the missing red spot - the black widow builds a more tangled nest. I left the spider to its work and moved on.

An eerie sight peered out at me – it looked like a cluster of eyeballs attached to bright red stems. I recognized it as doll's eyes or white baneberry (*Actaea pachypoda*). The appearance of the



plant is strange enough, but the result of ingesting any part of the plant can cause death due to cardiac disturbance.

As I returned to the Grass River Center, a rosy-red fungus cap grew in the leaf litter. Its gills and stem were brilliantly white. It was *Russula emetica* or "the sickener." You can imagine the unpleasant

results of eating this fungus.



Back at the Center, I did a bit more research. It seems we humans are unique in the way we see colors on the red spectrum. We are visual animals, and in gaining the ability to see color, we lost our reliance on senses that some other animals use more, particularly hearing and smell. So, for humans, it is a matter of learning which red organisms are safe.

Wildflower walks and fungus forays at Grass River Natural Area are good ways to observe organisms in their natural habitats. The Grass River Center has a good selection of field guides for sale and a reference library, so, take a stroll, take pictures, and ask a naturalist about your observations.

\* The word Halloween was originally a contraction for All Hallows Eve, hence the apostrophe in the word which is seldom used now.

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## GRNA 2022 PHOTO CONTEST NOW OPEN FOR SUBMISSIONS



**2021 Judges' Choice Award**

**by Douglas Anger**

If you took photos on a visit to GRNA in the past year, and you think they should be recognized for an award, or you just want to share them with the GRNA community, now is

your chance. The 2022 photo contest is now taking submissions. Here is what you need to know.

**Photo Contest Guidelines:**

1. Submit your photos [online](#) no later than **Sunday, December 18, 2022**.
2. One person may enter up to 3 photographs.
3. Photos must be taken in the Grass River Natural Area or on the Grass River.
4. Photographs may be used by GRNA, Inc. in online and print materials. The staff makes a point of using many of these photos in promotional materials over the coming year.
5. Judging will be done by a panel of judges, as well as a public vote through "likes" on the GRNA Facebook page.
6. Winners will be announced in this newsletter and on Facebook at a later date.

The **Winning Photographers** will be awarded:

1. A printed photo on display at the Grass River Center.
2. A Grass River Care Package from the Grass River Gift Shop.

Questions? Contact James Dake at [james@grassriver.org](mailto:james@grassriver.org).



**2021 People's Choice Award**

by Robert Lawshe

Watch for posts on Facebook of the photos entered in early January 2023  
and be sure to vote in the People's Choice category!!

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## PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON



### ***Owl Prowl***

***Friday, October 21***

***7:00 pm – 8:30 pm***

***\$10 per person – MUST PRE-REGISTER***

Join a Grass River Natural Area educator to learn about our local owls and their conservation with an introductory presentation, and then head out for a night hike in search of these amazing birds. Participants should be comfortable walking outdoors at night for about 1 mile on uneven trails. Bring a light. Must pre-register. **No walk-in spaces available.**

[Click here to register.](#)



### ***Autumnfest***

***Saturday, October 22***

***11:00 am – 2:00 pm***

***Free to all families***

Come out to Grass River Natural Area to have some autumn fun.

Your time will be filled with activities for all ages including a trick-or-treat trail on our boardwalk with “animal” encounters along the way, pumpkin pounding, fall arts and crafts, and games. There will be snacks and apple cider to enjoy as well.

***Introduction to Herbaria: The Science and History of Plant-Pressing***

**THIS PROGRAM HAS BEEN POSTPONED FOR A LATER DATE - please email [james@grassriver.org](mailto:james@grassriver.org) to be updated**



**Wild Turkey Trot  
5k**

**Saturday,  
November 12  
Race starts at  
11:00 am**

Celebrate autumn  
with a wild turkey

trot 5k on the trails at Grass River. Natural Area. Participate in one of three ways. 1 & 2). Run or walk the designated course on race day with other participants or 3). run your own 5k at your own convenience and submit your time later. To register for the race, simply purchase the Wild Turkey Trot t-shirt or sweatshirt on Bonfire ([Wild Turkey Trot 5k | Bonfire](#)). The shirt will be mailed directly to you. All ages are welcome. All proceeds go to support the educational programming at Grass River. If you want to register for the race but do NOT want a t-shirt, you can just pay the registration fee [here](#).

## **GRASS RIVER CENTER HOURS**

**through October**

**10:00 am - 4:00 pm, 7 days per week**

**beginning November 1**

**10:00 am - 4:00 pm, Saturdays and Sundays only**

**Trails open from dawn to dusk year-round**

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### **REMINDER**

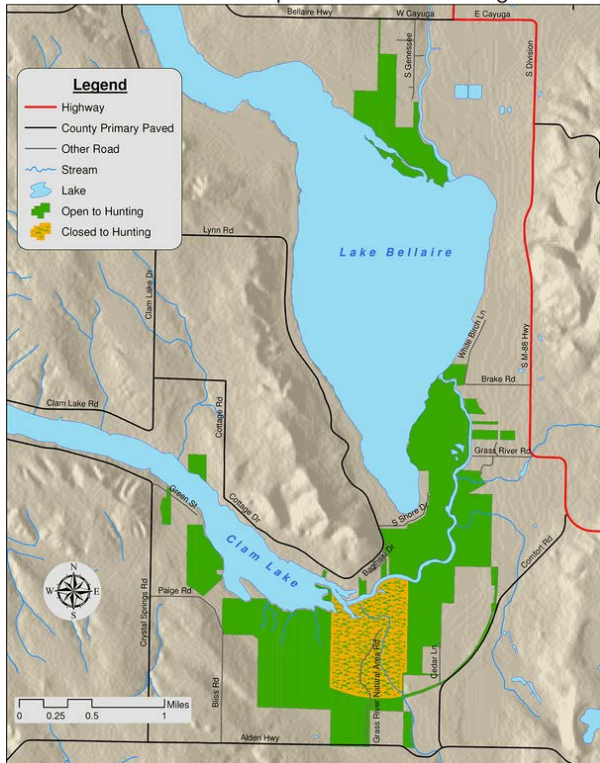
**FALL HUNTING SEASON IS HERE**

**TAKE CARE AND PLEASE OBSERVE THE RULES**

Many people enjoy hunting in the undisturbed areas in the Grass River Natural Area, and we welcome hunters as long as they observe the regulations set out by Antrim County.

**Antrim County Ordinance Section 13, #1 of 1988 allows hunting on Grass River Natural Area property outside of the “Education Zone” during appropriate hunting seasons.**

## GRNA - Areas Open/Closed to Hunting



The Education Zone is shown in yellow on the map. An enlarged version can be viewed by [clicking here](#).

Please be considerate of the boundaries, as we educate youth and adults in the Education Zone year-round. If these guidelines are not followed, hunting poses a risk to the public and our staff.

Also, please take care to stay off neighboring properties and observe a safe distance from permanent structures along GRNA's boundary.

If you are hiking at GRNA this fall, we ask that you consider wearing hunter orange, even when walking in the

Education Zone, to make yourself highly visible.

## COZY HOODIES AND SWEATSHIRTS FOR FALL HIKES

Purchase shirts or hats and GRNA benefits



Choose from any of the logos above, printed on a variety of styles, colors, & sizes from youth to adult.

Order online by clicking on this box. A portion of the sale comes back to GRNA as a donation.

Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-two 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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