



**SUPERIOR LAND
PRESERVATION SOCIETY
NEWS**

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P.O. BOX 130041
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Turtlehead; A Superior Plant

By Dan Moerman

White turtlehead, or *Chelone glabra*, is a common and fairly widespread plant, from the Snapdragon family, found throughout the northeastern US, and in most of Michigan, where it has been found in most of the counties in the Lower Peninsula, and in a dozen counties scattered across the Upper Peninsula. It is an attractive plant with long slender leaves growing opposite one another on a long stem. At the end of the stem, for a month or more in the late summer, it produces a series of attractive white tube-like flowers, sometimes tinged with violet, which look remarkably like the head of a turtle, accounting for its common name. Its scientific name, appropriately enough, means "turtle" or "tortoise," in Greek. As each flower forms seeds, a new one pops out above it. The plant prefers low ground along streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes; it is also found in swamps, marshes, and thickets. I think it might be a useful addition to the garden growing where one usually is stuck with *Hosta*.

A half dozen native American groups found the plant useful as a medicine or food. The Cherokee used it to treat worms, sores, and fevers; the Micmac and Malecite both used it to prevent pregnancy, while the Iroquois used the mashed roots as an anti-witchcraft medicine. I'm not certain that I'd rely on it for any of these myself, except perhaps the last one.

Χελωνη or Khelônê, the source of the name of this lovely plant, was a nymph in Greek mythology who, for reasons of her own, refused to go to the wedding of Zeus and Hera. Zeus, always



Chelone obliqua Photo by Dan Moerman

a bit quick on the trigger, took serious offense, and threw the nymph, and her house, into a river where she became a turtle, carrying her house on her back for the rest of time. Exactly how "*Chelone*" is pronounced is, to me, a mystery – I've asked 8 botanists, and checked three or 4 reference sources and gotten at least 6 answers. It's either two syllables, or three (*Che-lone*, or *Che-lo-ne*), and the first is pronounced either "*Chi*" (as in *cheese*) or "*Key*" (as in . . . *key*). As one colleague told me, it doesn't really matter, just sound authoritative.

One fall day, I noticed a lovely white turtlehead growing along a wetland toward the back of our property. As I examined it, I realized that I had seen another plant, very much like it, that morning in my wife's flower garden. Except that one had red flowers. Walking back to the house, I asked Claudine about it; she explained that she had not planted it, but that it had just "showed up" one day two or three years earlier, and had settled in among the yarrow, achillea, echinacea, asters, and other late summer flowers.

So I went to the source, and looked up the plant in Ed Voss' *Flora of Michigan* (Cranbrook Press, 3 volumes, 1972, 1985, 1996). This garden plant was clearly red turtlehead, *Chelone obliqua*, similar to the white one, but with a more compact habit, and a lovely red-violet flower. Most striking, although it occurs in a half dozen states mostly south and east of us, it has only ever been discovered in Michigan in Washtenaw County. Voss tells us that it was first discovered in Michigan in 1904 "along the Huron River east of Ann Arbor [that is, in Superior Township], where it has not been rediscovered. Also grows in thickets along the same river northwest of Ann Arbor. Apparently very rare, and listed as endangered in the state" (1996, p. 225). It has, however, by now been rediscovered in Claudine's garden, in Superior Township, back on the east side of town.

Those who read floras will be familiar with descriptions of plants which have become "naturalized," that is, they have escaped gardens and begun to grow in the wild. In this case, we have the reverse. The plant seems to have escaped nature, and to have joined us in the world of culture (or at least of horticulture). At least in our case. But you can find it in garden shops, and plant it in those shady places it likes (ours has grown in one of the sunniest places in the garden!) It may help protect your garden against witchcraft. And it can remind you of the Galapagos Islands.



Galapagos tortoise Photo by Dan Moerman

News from the Chair, by Marion Morris

This year began in a very sad way. We lost, to a sudden, terminal illness, Jan Berry, a member of our board, our newsletter editor, as well as our membership secretary, and a dear dear friend to all of us.

Jan worked tirelessly in our behalf contributing not only to the inner workings of SLPS but also giving of herself at various events: Superior Day, Dixboro Festivals, etc., to name a few.

She is missed very very much.

I know, however, that Jan would want us to carry on with the good work we are doing in Superior Township to preserve tis rural character.

With that in mind, we have created a list of what we hope to accomplish in this year and beyond.

Because we are limited in manpower, we are again collaborating with like-minded groups to carry out beneficial, conserving projects in Superior Township.

Your continued support allows us the ability to do this. Thank you, thank you.

A little buzz about native bees

By **Marion Morris**

Our horse paddock is made up of untreated 2x4s. For the past 3 years or so, one of these boards has become home to a nest of carpenter bees. They have made two holes on the bottom side, and they hover and zip in and around their nest site from spring until first frost. I see them at my flowers and my apple tree when it blossoms. They don't bother any of us as we pass close by; in fact, there have been times one has paused in mid-flight to (it would seem) look at me.

These are native bees, which are little known, often misunderstood, insects vital to our ecosystem. There are 4,000+ species of bees in North America, and are key pollinators for most native flowering plants and for many crop plants as well, including tomatoes, fruit and nut trees, squashes, melons, and blueberries.



1A pair of Red Mason Bees, Osmia rufa, from Wikipedia

Unlike Africanized bees, native bees are easy to get along with - they rarely sting. And they are in trouble. Populations are declining due to habitat loss and pesticide use, as well as climate change,

competition with introduced species of honeybees, and infection from imported diseases. The good news is that gardeners can help.

A few of the native bees common to our area are bumblebees, carpenter bees and sweat bees. They're fun to watch. There are hoverers, darters and soarers; big bees that bumble about like tipsy drinkers, as well as tiny ones whose wings shimmer in constant motion.

Native bees generally dress in basic black, with yellow, orange, red or pearly stripes, though sweat bees dazzle in metallic greens and blues. They range from nearly two-inch long carpenter bees to tiny Perdita bees, not much bigger than a pinhead.

Some bees are solitary, but bumblebees and sweat bees are colonial, living in extended family groups of tens to hundreds. They make honey, but only enough to feed their families.

Unlike non-native honey bees or Africanized bees, these species are mild-mannered neighbors, and their colonies are short-lived, beginning anew each spring.

Without these busy pollinators, ecosystems unravel. Like all creatures, mature bees require several things for survival: a safe, healthy place to live, water and food. Out with the pesticides!!!!

There are flowers that are bee magnets, and here are some you may have, or might plant: yarrow, primrose, purple lupine, purple coneflower, poppies, goldenrod, rosemary, golden current shrubs, hummingbird mint, thyme, lavender, sunflowers, salvia, bee balm, squashes, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and fruit and nut trees.

Restoring and maintaining habitat for mature bees is a good thing for all of us to do. Home gardening alone can't replace lost habitats, but habitat restoration projects in our township preserves and parks, along with gardening, will certainly help "create abuzz."

Chipmunks

By Marion Morris

Chipmunks are familiar to everyone. They are like squirrels in some ways, but have interesting characteristics of their own. When I think of the many chipmunks I see around my house, my first thought is they are pretty. They are also smaller, more numerous and are seen more often than the red or fox squirrels.



Chipmunks, photo by CStallion, 6/14/15, from the internet.

Chipmunks are seen more often because they are ground dwellers. Instead of climbing trees, they scurry around on the ground. Instead of living in nests in trees, they live in underground burrows.

The burrow is more than just a place to hide. It is a whole underground world where the chipmunks have provided space for everything they need.

It begins by digging a tunnel straight down, then at an angle until it is well below the frostline. The entrance is usually hidden by a log, stump, or boulder. (Editor's note: unless it is placed directly in the middle of a gravel path. See photo.)

Then the chipmunk digs a food storage chamber, sleeping space, toilet chamber, and if a female, a nesting chamber. There is often an exit tunnel as well.

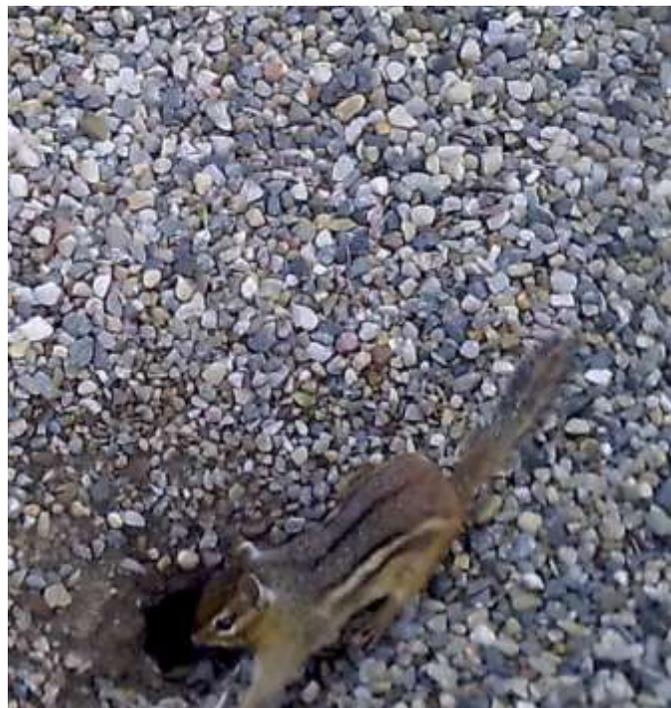
Unlike squirrels, who bury seeds and nuts all over the place, the chipmunk stores all of its winter supplies in its

burrow. Its special cheek pouches save it from making separate trips with each item of food. A surprising amount of food can fit into those expandable cheeks. A chipmunk with its cheeks loaded looks as if it has a severe case of the mumps.

Chipmunks don't hibernate in the winter. Instead, they stay in their underground burrow, living off all the food they have stored; they spend a lot of time sleeping. Above ground life can be perilous. Among the chipmunk's enemies are hawks, weasels, foxes, coyotes and snakes, as well as cats and cars.

I love watching chipmunks, with their stripes, tan and reddish coats. Watching them cram food into their cheeks is fun. When alarmed, they run with their tails straight up. They are always very busy; a picture of industry and foresight.

Of all the wild creatures, this is one that is easy to spot whether you live in town or in the country, one that will put a smile on your face.



Chipmunk going into his burrow in the gravel path around the editor's house. Photo by Dan Moerman.



Bald Eagle by John James Audubon; this image is in the public domain

BALD EAGLES IN SUPERIOR TOWNSHIP Sandi Lopez

There are bald eagles in Superior Township! There are over 700 pairs of them nesting in Michigan. They have been seen doing things like flying over the LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve and farm fields, sitting in trees and eating road killed deer (!). Every time I have seen them I consider it one of the deepest honors I have had. They are such beautiful birds. The first time I saw them in Superior Township was as they were flying over the fields at Prospect and Vreeland and I was driving on Vreeland. It was all I could do to avoid wrecking my car.

The amazing birds were almost lost due to habitat destruction and DDT poisoning which caused their eggs to fail due to very thin shells. They have been and still are occasionally being shot. I honestly can't tell you why but one was found shot in Washtenaw County in early April, 2016. Hearing that just broke my heart.

By banning DDT, placing them on the list of protected species and working to restore their habitat we have had good

success in bringing them back from the edge.

About them

The Bald Eagle is the only eagle unique to North America.

The birds get their distinctive pure white head and tail only after they reach maturity at 4 to 5 years of age. When you see one up close one thing that stands out is the yellow in their bill and in their eyes and their feet. Their bill is nearly as large as their head, and their wing span can be as long as 7 1/2-8 feet and they can weigh up to 14 pounds. The female is larger than the male. They feed on fish and carrion.



Photo by W. Lloyd MacKenszie, via Flickr.

When bald eagles reach maturity (at four to five years of age), they select a mate, with whom they mate for life. If one eagle dies, the survivor will accept a new mate. In captivity, they have been known to live to 50 years, but in the wild, they may live up to 30 years although 20 years is more likely.

The beginning of their breeding season, from mid-February to mid-March, consists of the establishment of a territory, nest building and mating displays. Their mating "cartwheel" display begins high in the air with the two birds darting and diving at each other, until they lock talons and drop in a spinning free fall, until the last possible moment when they separate. The nest is usually located in the tallest tree in the area, often a white pine or dead snag. They are usually made of sticks with a lining of grass and moss. Nests may be added to each year until they reach enormous sizes, up to 12 feet in depth and 10-20 feet across. Their nests are sometimes used year after year and can weigh thousands of pounds after years of use.

From late March to early April, one to four (average two) pure white eggs, approximately twice the size of a chicken egg, are laid. Both males and female bald eagles participate in the incubation, and the feeding of the chicks that hatch around seven weeks later. In about three months, by late summer, the fledglings are ready for flight. When it is time to move for the winter, the young birds move on without their parents, assuming their own individual lives.

Keep your eyes peeled and pass the word on when you see an eagle.

Preservation Celebration

The Superior Land Preservation Society, the Superior Township Chapter of the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, and Superior Charter Township are pleased to invite you to participate in our 25-year celebration of land conservation within the Township. Please save the date of July 9, 2016 for our Preservation Celebration — 25 Years of Land Conservation in Superior Township, to be held from 1:00 to 5:00 pm at the Superior Township Hall, 3040 N. Prospect Road. Although specific program details are still in progress, we will feature special speakers, music, food and lots of information and activities, along with shuttles to docent-led walks in Superior Township's Cherry Hill Nature Preserve. We hope to have representatives of area conservation-minded organizations in attendance to share in the celebration and tell their own local conservation stories.

If you are interested in celebrating with us and taking part in the event, please contact Carla Bisaro, ckbisaro@comcast.net, to request further information. Arrangements can be made to provide display space for any groups or individuals who wish to take an active part in the celebration. **Mark your calendar, and come on out and celebrate with us!**

