



# Superior Land Preservation Society News

SPRING-SUMMER  
2019  
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## Celebration News!!

By Marion Morris, Chair of SLPS

Superior Land Preservation Society is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> year of preservation efforts in Superior Township.

In 2009 our tiny group split away from Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy because we desired an all volunteer organization, using donations for projects only in Superior Township.

Our aim was to assist and/or collaborate with other like-minded groups for land acquisition, management, education, stewardship projects. We did not want to be a land owner; and we did not want to pay staff.

Here is a list of some accomplishments which account for over \$85,000 of donated funds.

- 2009: We established our board, obtained 501(c)(3) (tax exempt) status from the IRS, set up accounts, developed a newsletter, and looked for projects, etc.
- 2010 We gave donations for purchase and preservation of a 40 acre parcel at the corner of Prospect and Geddes Roads.
- 2012 We gave a donation for purchase, preservation and stewardship of the historic Free Church Site at the corner of Gotfredson and Ford Roads. More recently, we have supported ongoing investigations at that site by historic archaeologist John Chenoweth.
- 2012 We made a donation for eradication of Phragmites (a really nasty invasive species) at Le Furge Woods.
- 2013 thru 2018 We made a series of donations for the construction of boardwalks and benches in Cherry Hill Nature Preserve.
- 2014 We made a donation for the construction of trails and signs in

Weatherbee Woods Preserve.

- 2015 We made a donation for maintenance of the Jack Smiley Preserve at the SE corner of Prospect and Cherry Hill Roads.
- 2017 We made a donation toward the purchase of the Clark Road Preserve.
- 2018 We made financial pledges, and set funds aside, for the purchase and/or development rights on 3 properties (now in negotiation) in Superior Township.

2019 The work continues and we celebrate!! A *big thank you* for 10 years of helping to keep Superior Township so unique, so green. Thanks to you from all the board members.

Two of Marion's favorite birds:



Female Cardinal



Male Cardinal

## Early Spring Wildflowers

### Spring Beauty

*Claytonia virginica*

Spring Beauty is a native wildflower blooming in early spring- usually from March to May. It has slender grass-like leaves and a loose cluster of flowers borne on a single stem. These are usually pale pink or white with deeper pink veining on the petals, and the plants can form large colonies spreading through trailing tuberous roots. Also spread by ants as the seeds produced after blooming have what is known as an Elaiosome attached to each seed; a fleshy protein rich part that is collected by the ants and fed to their larvae. Once the Elaiosome is consumed, the remaining seed is transported to the ants waste area where it may germinate.

The tubers below ground as well as all parts of the plant that exist above ground are edible and often collected by edible wild plant enthusiasts.



Spring Beauty, *Claytonia virginica*



These Spring Beauties have established themselves in Claudine Farrand's flower garden; Claudine is the Treasurer for SLPS!

### Bloodroot

*Sanguinaria canadense*

A native wildflower of the Poppy family is another of our earliest blooming wildflowers. Sometimes forming large colonies and blooming from March to May. A single rounded lobed leaf emerges first, and then a single stem that will bear the flower comes up next to that. The leaf clasps the flower stem until the blossom, a delicate short-lived white blossom with 8 -12 petals and yellow stamens, is ready to open. The seeds of the Bloodroot also bear Elaiosomes, and can be spread by ants in the same manner as the seeds of the Spring Beauty. All parts of the Bloodroot are toxic. The red sap, that gives the plant its name, was used by Native Americans for various ailments. It was also used as a dye for baskets and other weaving, but is not considered safe to apply to the skin or ingest.



Bloodroot, *Sanguinaria canadense*.

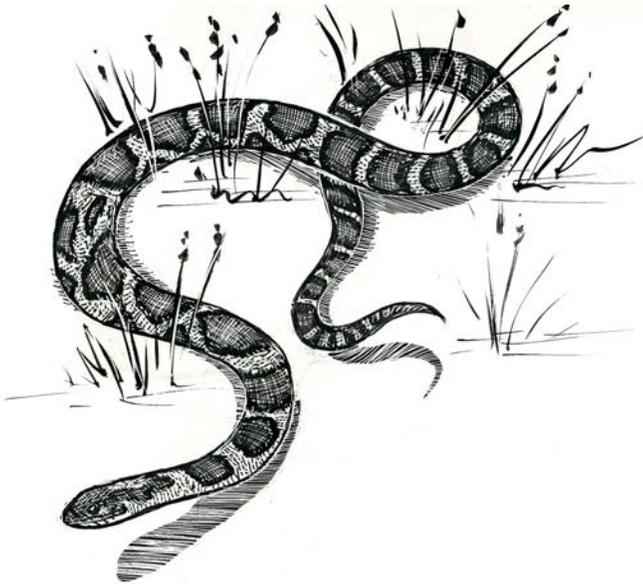


## Snakes you might (or might not) see

by John Copley

A friend recently told me that he had found a large rattlesnake which had been killed in the road near his home. He described it, saying it was about 3 feet long and he was concerned for his children's safety if these snakes were in his neighborhood. He had a photo on his phone and when he showed it to me I was able to assure him that it was not in fact a Massasauga rattlesnake as he feared, but a Milk snake.

There are many visual similarities between these snakes, and it is easy to make a misidentification. Both snakes are similarly marked and colored, but the Milk snake has more distinct separate bands of color and the brown tends to be redder. Massasauga rattlesnakes have duller brown and grey markings and the bands are not as distinctive. Milk snakes are slender long snakes (up to four feet) with smooth scales and a narrow head. Massasauga are roughly scaled, have the typical triangular head and vertical pupils of a rattlesnake, and are heavy thick snakes seldom more than 30 inches long. They are timid and



Milk Snake.

retiring, preferring escape to confrontation. Milk snakes are common in rural areas and farmsteads, Massasauga are found in low wet areas like wetlands and streams.

Farmers generally like having Milk snakes around as they prey mostly on rodents like mice,

rats and voles. Massasauga keep to themselves in the low wet areas, eat similar prey but are more likely to find frogs and salamanders. One of the behaviors of the Milk snake when threatened or cornered is to vibrate the end of their tail in the leaves or grass, making a sound like a typical rattlesnake, increasing the possibility of misidentification. The rattle of the Massasauga is not like the traditional "rattle" sound, but is



Rattlesnake

more like the buzz of a wasp. The bite of the Massasauga is very poisonous, but they have relatively little venom, so it is less likely to be fatal but still requires immediate emergency action. Do not use a tourniquet or ice on a Massasauga bite- get to an ER as quickly as possible for an anti-venom shot. It is illegal to possess or harm the Massasauga rattlesnake. Milk snakes are non venomous, more docile and human friendly and can make interesting pets, but should be left in the wild to perform their beneficial function of controlling the rodent population. Before harming any snake, please take time to observe them and determine if they present any danger to you or your family or pets. Most snakes prefer to leave than attack. Massasauga are the only venomous snake in Michigan, and one which you are highly unlikely to encounter.

**Editor's note:** years ago, my 4 year old granddaughter stayed with us over a weekend. I told her she should get dressed so we could take her home. A half hour later, she wasn't dressed. I asked her why. "There is a snake in my closet," she said. You guessed it, a baby milk snake, probably brought in by Click, or Clack, our cats.

## Marion's musings; Thoughts from the Chair

by Marion Morris

### A Pokeweed Experience

In 2017, I received a free packet of flower seeds in the mail, with both annual and perennial seeds. I broadcast them into a bed that had open space.

What emerged was pleasing, however one of the plants I had never seen before; Nice green leaves, branches all pinkish-red with little hot pink stemlets. Pretty, I thought. Mid-summer green berries appeared turning into shiny, round black berries.

Spring 2018, there emerged 4 plants; there was room enough so I let them be. The original plant was larger and tall. In September 2018 an article



Pokeweed, *Phytolacca americana*

appeared in the Detroit News headed "give these plants a wide berth" by Adrian Higgins, originally from the Washington Post. The article listed and described Jimson Weed, Poison Ivy, Poison Hemlock, Giant Hogweed and, you guessed it, American Pokeweed.

I had always thought Pokeweed was a southern U.S. plant because of the song "Poke Salad Annie!!!" The article told me it is found everywhere and as a perennial it gets larger every year and is spread by the berries eaten by birds and distributed.

Avoid skin contact and keep children away from the berries. Pokeweed is one of the most common sources of plant poisoning in the United States.

Now much wiser, I very carefully (long sleeves, gloves, large black bags) removed the plants and roots from my garden. I hope I never see this plant again!

### Pussy Willows

Looking out my window on a dismal overcast day in March, it seems that winter has managed to kill off everything. But pretty soon migrating birds will return and the earliest wild flowers will appear. It's on these days that I know it is a good time to look for pussy willows.

Pussy willows (*Salix discolor*) are known to just about everyone. They are the male



Pussy Willows, *Salix discolor*

portion the willow tree's reproductive system. Within a short period, two weeks or so, the smooth silver "pussies" will open into yellow, pollen laden catkins. In willow trees, male catkins grow on one tree, and different looking female catkins grow on another, But mother nature has created plans so willow trees can reproduce.

When bees first start looking for food in the spring, they head straight for the willow trees because willows are among the earliest pollen and nectar producers. When the hungry bees gather pollen from the male trees and then visit the female trees for nectar, the bees will be pollinating while they gather food.

Every year, I pick a few twigs and bring them in; my first bouquet of spring. The best place to look for pussy willows is near wet ditches, around the edges of a pond or marsh, or anywhere the ground stays wet. There is only one species of willow that has the soft silver buds. It's a shrubby tree with a short trunk and lots of branches, growing 20 to 25 feet tall. Its Latin name is *Salix discolor*.

So next spring watch for those soft silver buds, pick a few twigs and take them home. You will be welcoming the arrival of spring.

## More musings from Marion Maple sap

It was the Native Americans who introduced maple syrup to the early settlers which was most welcome, because sugar was very difficult to obtain and was very expensive. Today, maple syrup is produced en masse in the northern portions of Michigan and Vermont as well as in Canada. The province of Quebec produces some 8,000,000 gallons of syrup annually, 3 times the amount produced in the next 10 largest producers. Michigan is the seventh largest commercial producer, making about 82,000 gallons annually.

You may wonder why I'm telling you this with Superior Township located in southeast Michigan. But did you know that there are people in this township who tap maple trees for sap?

Sugaring time comes every year, but it doesn't come at a specific date on the calendar. It begins sometime in late February or early March when the days get warmer, but it's still cold at night. That's when sap starts moving in the vessels inside a tree. The tap is a "tapping bit" which is 7/16-inch drill bit. To "tap" is to drill a hole about 3 inches into a maple tree and drive in a metal or plastic spout. A tap-hole creates an unexpected low resistance when it severs the vessels. Some of the sap that would have been pushed up or down in the tree is sent right out of the spout into a bucket hung on the spout.

Only "hard maples" (Sugar or Black, *Acer saccharum* or *Acer nigrum*) can be used for sugaring. The sap is watery and slightly sweet.

It takes anywhere from 30 to 50 gallons of sap, boiled down, to yield one gallon of golden brown sugar. The process of making the syrup is labor intensive, from collecting the sap, to boiling, to jaring, is a day and night job. The boiling portion must be watched closely, the heat a constant temperature; the sap stirred often.

This is why a pint of pure maple syrup is expensive, but well worth it and oh so good!



Sugar Maple Leaf

## Orioles!

By Sandi Lopez

Orioles are some of the most beautiful residents of Superior Township. They have a bright orange body, emphasized by black and some white, which emphasize the orange and make them stand out. Or would that be fly out? Anyhow if you have seen them you know how dramatically beautiful they are.

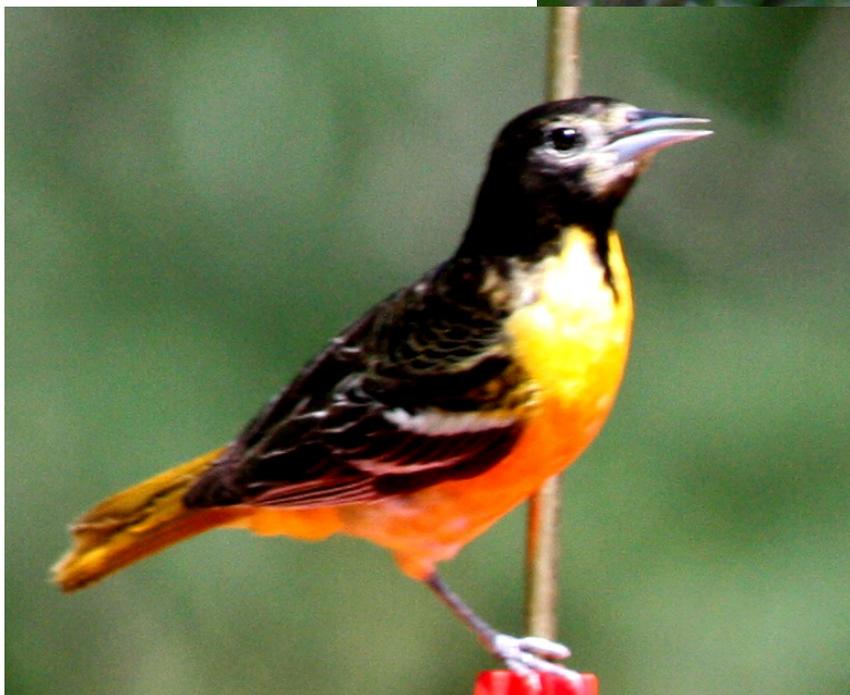
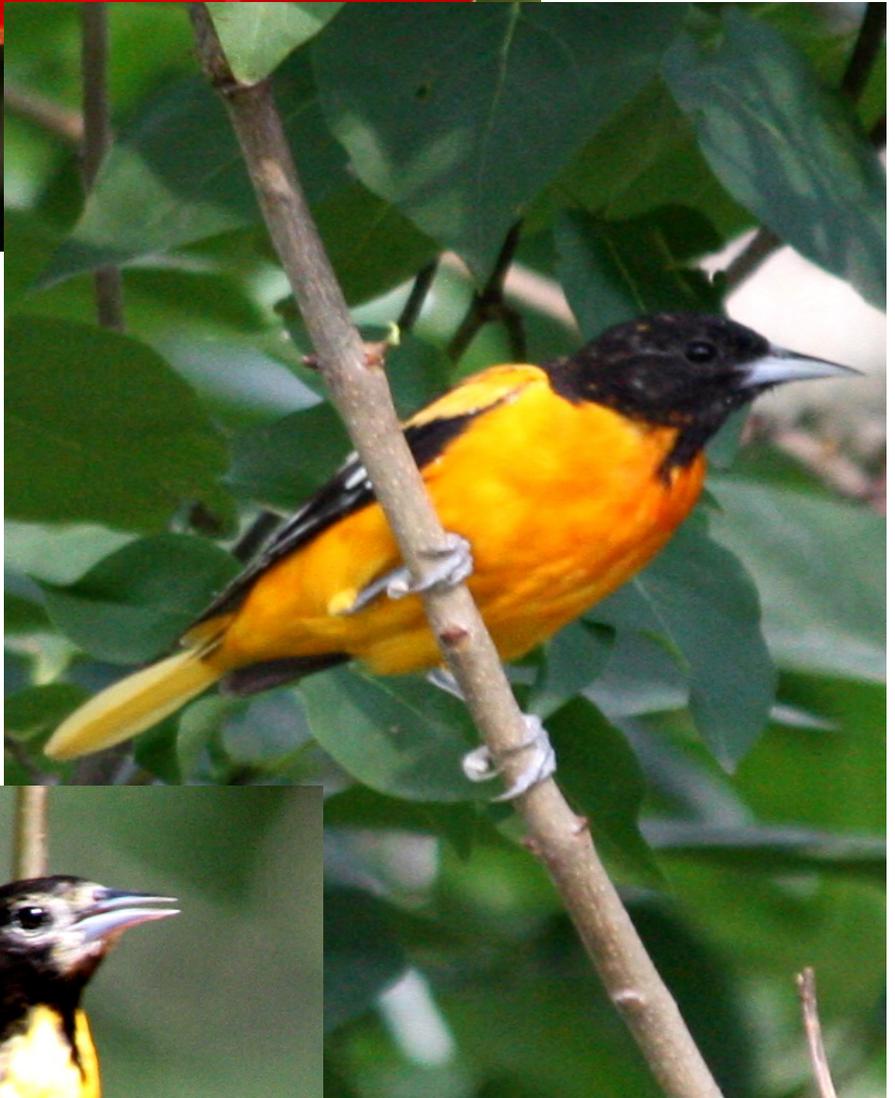
Baltimore Orioles (sometimes known as northern orioles) have returned from their winter homes in Mexico and South America. They have been seen in greater numbers than usual by me and several of my neighbors in Superior Township. Seeing one pair in your yard is not uncommon. Seeing 5 or 6 pair is not common, but that is the number of Oriole pairs I am seeing in my yard. I am delighted by them. They are having a wonderful time flying from bush to bush to tree to Hummingbird feeders to grape jelly to oranges. I put out four feeders for the hummers, because I wanted lots of them in my yard. Imagine my surprise when I saw so many Orioles using them. During the first days they were around, they were accompanied by their counterparts, the Bullock's Oriole which has a richer, less flamboyant orange color and tend to live further west than the Baltimore Orioles. They are known to interbreed commonly in Oklahoma and Nebraska, where their ranges overlap significantly

Baltimore Orioles are named after Sir George Calvert, an early colonizer of Maryland, known as the "First Baron of Baltimore", and known for his bright orange coat of arms. They are classified in the Troupial Family of birds. That is a large family which includes blackbirds, orioles, meadowlarks, cowbirds and bobolinks among other birds.

Orioles can be attracted by hummingbird feeders and by grape jelly in a small bowl with something orange under or next to it get the bird's attention. They also eat garden peas, blackberries, cherries, grapes and other fruit. They love oranges -- If you cut one in half and use a single nail to attach it to a tree, they will be delighted to come and eat it, along with your suet and peanut butter mixes.

They lay their eggs in May and June. The young hatch about 12 – 14 days after being laid, and they first fly after another 12-14 days.

**Some orioles, photos by Sandi Lopez**



These are among the delights of living in Superior Township where we have open space, farmlands, parks and preserves where creatures like this can live in peace. And can come to our yards to eat oranges!