President’s Note

First, I would like to thank everyone who both attended and presented at WAM’s annual conference. It was a smashing success. The conference co-chairs, Esther Durnwald and Trish Hacker-Henning, both deserve a special thanks for the incredible time and effort they put forth to make the conference possible. Douglas Tallamy, as expected, was superb. Several attendees commented to me that they could listen to him speak for an entire day and would still be engrossed. Laurel Ross was absolutely wonderful and she is a true gem from the Chicago Wilderness. The seed starting and mushroom workshops were very well received and we hope to continue with hands-on sessions for future conferences. The Educators’ Workshop had a very high enrollment, and it’s very rewarding to know that those educators will be disseminating the knowledge they acquired to our youth. But now is not the time to dwell on the past; we have a board meeting next week and planning for the 2014 conference will begin.

Now onto more pressing matters… apparently spring is finally here. The early spring ephemerals have started blooming, a chorus of frogs can be heard in our wetlands and temporary pools, and the migrant birds are returning. My wife even swatted a mosquito in our house a couple of days ago. For me, it is time to start covering my driver’s side mirror as our resident male Pileated Woodpecker has returned to his breeding territory. Last year he shattered my mirror. If you’ve seen the holes they blast out of trees, it is easy to imagine how quickly he dispatched my mirror. I guess I should be thankful that we are graced by his presence every day during the spring and early summer; I’m definitely grateful he has not seen his reflection in our house windows. A pair of Phoebes has also taken up residence in our front yard and has started building a nest under the overhang on our front porch. Amazingly, a pair has nested in the same place every single year since we moved to our home in 1998. Obviously it is not the same individuals, but the habitat must be ideal for this species. “If you build it, they will come.” I also found a tick crawling on my arm last week during one of the warm days. Oh yes, they’re back… (insert your own spooky sound here). The ticks and I go way back, you could almost say we are friends. Unfortunately, things have changed a bit. The last couple of years we have started finding occasional Deer Ticks (a.k.a. Black-legged Ticks). This is the species associated with Lyme disease. Whereas in the past ticks were just a somewhat creepy annoyance, now they can severely impact our health. As such, follow the lead of our monkey brethren and check for ticks in your hair each day after you spend time outdoors, and also wear the appropriate clothing. I find some of the new materials with insect deterrent infused into them to be extremely useful; particularly the pants and socks.

If you have any children in your lives, do them a favor and take them outdoors as much as you can this spring and summer. Allow them to explore the natural world and form a connection with nature. And yes, you will need to check them for ticks, but those risks are minute as compared to those associated with leading a sedentary lifestyle filled with texting, watching TV, and playing video games.

Chad
Watching Dragonflies

If you are amazed by the colors, shapes, sizes, and flight of insects, there are no better natural aerialists than dragonflies! The July-August 2012 issue of Audubon magazine featured an article by Mitchel and Lasswell on how best to watch them. These are the ‘top guns’ of the insect air force being able to fly at speeds up to 30 mph, dart forward or backward, pivot instantly, and of course hover at ease. Michigan is home to dozens of genera and scores of species with names like skimmer, glider, ringtail, comet, darter, and darners. Guides can be found summarized for their identification on Audubon’s website www.audubonmagazine.org. Other useful sites include:

www.Dragonflywebsite.com

www.biokids.umich.edu/critters/anisoptera


Robert Krueger

Natives For Your Woodland Garden: Hepaticas

Hepaticas are just what a spring flower should be: small, delicate, and pastel colored; varied from white through pink/lavender to deep purple. These are members of the Buttercup family (Ranunculaceae). Two species are present in just about every county in Michigan, according to Voss and Reznicek’s “Field Manual of Michigan Flora.” Those are Hepatica acutiloba and Hepatica Americana. The main difference between the two is the middle lobe of the leaf; being acute in the former and more rounded or obtuse in the latter.

The habitat for both species is dry or moist upland woods. Leaves produced stay through the year and photosynthesize even on “warm” winter days. Older leaves turn a deep burgundy before withering. Flowering before the trees leaf out, both species prefer somewhat alkaline soils but tolerate a range of soils. The plant stores energy in its rhizomes/tubers/corms and its beautiful flowers are actually 5-12 sepals, with many stamens and pistils.

Peter Berndt studied the pollination ecology of the flowers in up-state New York and found over 40 different insect species visiting these early arrivals. He noted that flies, solitary bees, honeybees, and beetles visit the blossoms. Ants also benefit from the seeds (achenes), which have elaiosomes attached. Germination of the achenes as discarded near the ants’ nest is slow but aided by the enriched soil that surrounds the nest. Achenes appear in fall with cotedon, emerging the following spring. Seeds require a cold period to break dormancy.

Though some taxonomists place these in the genus anemone, I favor the traditional Hepatica name. The plants, once almost extirpated due to their erroneous medicinal attributes, now are found only in a few herbal remedies. The leaves, like many of its sister genera in the Buttercup family, are said to be toxic to ingest.

You may want to try these in your garden. After all, the noted naturalist John Burroughs wasn’t wrong when he said “there are many things left for May, but none fairer, if as fair, as the first flower, the Hepatica”.

With thanks to Carol Gracie and her Hepatica monograph in “Spring Wildflowers of the Northwest”

Robert Krueger
WAM Board of Directors 2013: From left: Esther Durnwald, Laura Liebler, Michael Saint, Trish Hacker-Henning, Robert Krueger, Chad Hughson, Jean Weirich, Tom Small  Missing from photo: Bill Schneider and John Delisle

WAM Grant Recipients From Left to Right: Jen Howell and Michelle Skedgell (Pierce Cedar Creek Institute), Bri Krauss (MI Audubon Society), Melanie Gould (Sand Lake), Celia Larsen (Rudolph Steiner School) Laurie Grant and Michele VanderVelde (Sand Lake)