



THE PAWPAW PRESS

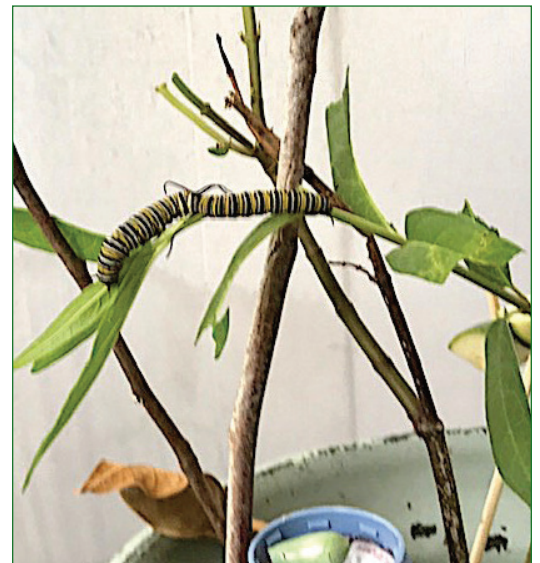
Newsletter of the Pawpaw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society: April 2020

Stay connected by joining us virtually

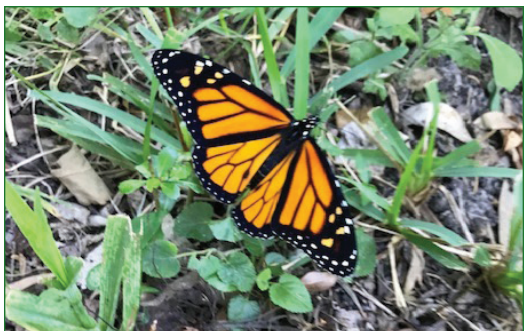
As with last month, the May 11 Pawpaw Chapter meeting will be an online gotomeeting. You can join from your computer, tablet or smartphone at <https://www.gotomeet.me/FNPS/volusia-county-ecosystems-with-don-spence>. To dial in using your phone: (571) 317-3122 and use the access code: 858-170-093. Dr. Don Spence, assistant professor of biology at Bethune-Cookman University, will present a program on Volusia County ecosystems and a review of the anatomy of plant tissues. And Sande Habali will introduce us to partridge pea as the plant of the month. We had a great “turnout” for the last meeting, and hope you’ll all tune in again.

Raising monarchs in a pandemic: drama and trauma

Raising monarch butterflies grew into a great distraction for me during my early adjustment to covid-19 downtime. Initially my goal was to add plants to my existing milkweeds for seed collection and to install more native milkweeds along the NSB bike trail. So I ventured (fully masked) into Lindley’s nursery where I selected six tall swamp milkweeds (*Asclepias incarnata*) and six sandhill whorled milkweed (*A. verticillata*) plants. To my delight, tiny caterpillars quickly began to appear on both species.



Then, just as suddenly, the caterpillars began to disappear, a sign that there was trouble in monarch paradise. The culprit was finally caught in the act when I saw a nasty-looking paper wasp flying off with a small caterpillar in its grasp. Then I discovered that these predator wasps were stealthily searching each leaf surface in the butterfly garden looking for their prey. The solution became large drawstring organza bags to enclose the branches with caterpillars safely munching inside.



When the bags weren’t large enough, I placed an inverted mesh clothes hamper over a large in-ground plant, only to find a wasp had found its way inside and was flying around with a baby caterpillar. So I ordered a large zippered mesh butterfly house ASAP.

The “cats” began to grow and grow. As they ate up all available leaves on one host plant, they had to be transported to a potted re-

serve swamp milkweed plant. The dozen growing caterpillars ended up consuming all the leaves on seven tall swamp milkweed plants as well as two mature white swamp milkweed plants (*A. perennis*). As the cats began to prepare to pupate, I placed them in the zippered monarch house. One by one caterpillars successfully attached themselves and wriggled themselves out of their caterpillar skins to become suspended chrysalises. But now, two hungry large caterpillars remained, with no food. In desperation, I transported these two cats out to some skinny leaved whorled milkweed plant, where it was the green seed pods that took the last cats to the chrysalis stage. Whew! With all the leaves gone, nine chrysalises were safe in the butterfly house.

The first chrysalis was formed on April 21, and a butterfly emerged from its darkened chrysalis shell on May 2. A small dark dot (gland) on its hind wing indicated it was a boy. Not knowing how long it would take for his wings to dry, I took him outside on his perch stick. He flew down to the grass where he continued to dry his wings, and 30 minutes later he was gone. So I assumed he had gone off to do his monarch duties. The next day, however, just 3 feet from his release site, I sadly came upon broken monarch wings but no body. Apparently, in

addition to paper wasps, aggressive Cuban anoles may be another predator to avoid. Three days later another butterfly emerged, a little mama monarch. This time I took her out and placed her on an elevated stick and watched for over an hour, as she occasionally flapped her wings, until she was able to take her first upward flight. There are seven chrysalis releases to go, then monarch raising season is over for this year.

—Story and photos by Sonya Guidry

If you want to try raising monarchs, Sonya suggests you stock up with the following items:

1. 10-12 nice, tall, big-leafed swamp milkweeds
2. Half a dozen large organza bags (10 x 12 inch), available from www.pouchdepotinc.com
3. Large(24 x 36 inch) zippered mesh butterfly enclosure (order online), which can hold up to two large nursery pots

In praise of essential trees

Sande reports hearing chainsaws in her neighborhood cutting down trees. We all know the benefits our trees offer globally, but she reminds us to please consider the many animals, like these owls perched alongside her driveway, that also depend on these trees for their existence.

Doug Tallamy forcefully makes the case for native trees in all of his work, including his new book, *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*. There's an insightful interview with him in the current Smithsonian: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/meet-ecologist-who-wants-unleash-wild-backyard-180974372/>



Notes from the April Council of Chapters meeting

The Council of Chapters meeting is held once a month virtually, as a Go-to-Meeting. A major topic of concern is the “new normal” for meeting. In fact, our own Pawpaw Chapter was one of the first chapters to meet virtually. We will do so again during the month of May and we had a virtual Board of Directors meeting on May 3.

A major disappointment for the Florida Native Plant Society is the postponement of the annual conference to 2021. Part of our conference includes a general meeting for all members to learn about the society as well as the election of officers. Since it is in the by-laws to hold an election, this year the election will be held virtually on June 6. Stay tuned for more details on how to vote. We will be asked to vote on the current slate of officers: President Bonnie Basham (currently president-elect), Director at Large Mark Kateli (Cuplet Fern chapter), Director at Large Andrea Naccarato (Naples chapter). More information about the slate of officers and how members can vote will be in Sabal Minor.

FNPS is working hard to get you outdoors, if only virtually. Consider subscribing (for free) to the Society's YouTube Channel. You may view past programs on "Lunch and Learn" topics, which are offered weekly, or chats with Cuplet Fern's Mark Kateli, or programs offered by individuals or chapters. You can even peek in on other chapters to view their meetings and speakers. Some programs are available to members only, while others are available to the general public. Recently the Florida Wildflower Association, offered a program with Doug Tallamy. If you missed the live presentation, you may go onto their website and watch it.

Please do not feel intimidated by this new technology because it is new to most of us. If you have questions, do not hesitate to reach out to us.

—Sande Habali and Karen Walter, co-chairs to the Council of Chapters, representing the Pawpaw Chapter

The Observatory

This month the newsletter launches a new feature, which we're calling The Observatory, to provide an opportunity for members to share what's blooming or has otherwise caught their eye in their garden or while out in nature discovering native plants. Send your contributions to Doug (in as high a resolution as possible) at shalehill@gmail.com. Doug will kick things off, but then it's up to you!



Above, a native anole that knows native firebush is a good thing.

Right, blue sage (*Salvia azurea*)



Above, Jamaica caper (*Quadrella jamaicensis*)



Chapter meetings and speakers

- May 11: Don Spence on Volusia ecosystems
- June 8: Nash Turley, UCF ecologist, on Lawn to Wildflowers
- July 13: Jenny Nazak, sustainability educator, on Soil 101
- Aug. 10: Linda Walters of UCF on Tomoka State Park restoration

Upcoming field trips, events

- May 9: Hickory Bluff Preserve, Osteen, **CANCELED**
- May 14–17: FNPS annual conference, Jacksonville, **CANCELED**
- May 18: Park of Honor work day, **CANCELED**
- June 13: Haw Creek Preserve State Park, Seville
- July 19: Black Point Wildlife Drive, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge