



Tersa Sphinx Moth Caterpillar

I first encountered Virginia Buttonweed in the raised beds we used in our first attempts to grow vegetables at Swiftbrook. Buttonweed was a daunting foe that completely overwhelmed the raised beds and soon invaded John's amended borders. I learned it's a native, but considered it undesirable in a garden.

Last fall when I began instinctively weeding Buttonweed from an area where I'm trying to establish several Milkweed species, I discovered a beautiful caterpillar. With the help of the identification app Seek, I learned the caterpillar was the larval stage of the Tersa Sphinx Moth. A Google search revealed that Virginia Buttonweed is one of the host plants for this beautiful moth.

The irony of removing a moth host plant from an area where I'm working to create a "pollinator garden" wasn't lost on me. While creating habitat for migrating Monarchs is a worthy goal, so is maintaining habitat for existing resident species.

Moths, like other insects, are in steep decline in our state and around the world. Widespread use of mosquito sprays and other pesticides contribute to moth decline. Ever-increasing light pollution disorients these nighttime flyers.

I decided to let the Buttonweed stay in my pollinator garden. I also committed to not letting the "must do's" of creating habitat — removing invasive plants, adding new native species —

Upcoming Events

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| Sept. 3– Sept. 25
Cary, NC | <u>Cary Environmental Symposium</u>
Four presentations, "designed to inspire thoughtful and principled civic debate on the challenges facing our air, land, water."
Coordinated by Trees for the Triangle and the Town of Cary |
| September 13
9:00 am–noon
Raleigh, NC | Reid Garden Workday
<u>NC Native Plant Society</u> |
| September 21
3:00–6:00 pm
Raleigh, NC | Swiftbrook Gardens Open Day
<u>Gardener by Nature Events</u> |
| September 27
1:00–3:00 pm
Raleigh, NC | Creating a Habitat Garden
<u>Gardener by Nature Workshops</u> |
| September 27
9:00 am–1:00 pm
Chapel Hill, NC | Fall Native Plant Sale
<u>North Carolina Botanical Garden</u> |
| October 11
9:00 am–noon
Raleigh, NC | Reid Garden Workday
<u>NC Native Plant Society</u> |
| November 8
9:00 am–noon
Raleigh, NC | Reid Garden Workday
<u>NC Native Plant Society</u> |
| November 11
9:30 am
Wake Forest, NC | Homegrown Habitat – Presentation
for Wake Forest Garden Club |

Northern River Oats are one of the shade-loving native grasses I write about in the September–October issue of [Triangle Gardener Magazine](#)



**Red-Spotted
Purple on
Garden
Glove**



prevent me from slowing down and pausing long enough to observe and learn more about the wonderful creatures who already rely on and thrive in our garden.

One of Swiftbrook's most frequently sighted butterflies is the Red-spotted Purple. Its host plants include Wild Cherry and Hawthorn, so our woodland garden provides ideal habitat. I often see Red-spotted purples on the ground, but was surprised three mornings in a row to find one settled, and seemingly feeding, on my dirty garden gloves. A little research led to the discovery that while these butterflies sometimes

feed on nectar from flowers, they prefer eating tree sap, rotting fruit, and nutrients from soil.

I took the time this summer to learn that the "funny-looking bug" I've watched crawl around on my New Jersey Tea is a Zebra Longhorn, one of a number of beetle species that serve as pollinators. A tiny jewel-colored insect I found on the Zinnias in my deck pots turned out to be a Long-legged Fly. This tiny predator helps keep aphids, spider mites, and other plant pests in check.

On a recent afternoon, the first Imperial Moth I've found in our garden was resting at the base of a Yucca near the driveway. Adult Imperial Moths do not feed, living only until they reproduce. They don't become active until late in the evening when they mate, so I was truly fortunate to spot this large beauty.

Please share this newsletter with others who are interested in habitat gardening. A few slots remain open for our September 27 workshop, [Creating a Habitat Garden](#). Please register right away if you are interested. I am also scheduling consultations for October and November.

I hope to see you at our [Fall Open Garden](#) on September 21 or one of the other events on our calendar.

*Happy Autumn,
Dale*



**New discoveries this summer
at Swiftbrook: (clockwise from
above)**

**Variegated Fritillary on Bird's
Foot Violet, Flower Longhorn
Beetle on Marie Pavie rose,
Zebra Longhorn Beetle on N.J.
Tea, Long-legged Fly on Zinnia
leaf, Imperial Moth on Yucca.**

