

## Bring Conservation Home's Floral and Faunal Connections Corner

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### The Buckeye and the Slender-Leaved False Foxglove

By Cori Westcott

While enjoying the expansive vista of a prairie, my eye stopped upon a strange looking little creature just beyond the boardwalk.



Photo credit: Cori Westcott

A Buckeye, *Junonia coenia*, caterpillar was dining upon a Slender-leaved False Foxglove, *Agalinus tenuifolia* (formerly a *Gerardia*). The False Foxglove was in the middle of its flowering time, from August to October. Its pink, tubular-shaped bloom has five petals. Like its name, the leaves are indeed very slender.

Don't be discouraged if you can't find a vendor who sells *Agalinus tenuifolia*. The Buckeye is a generalist insect. The caterpillars can feast on a number of plants. If you have chosen not to treat your lawn with herbicides anymore, you may already have one of the Buckeye's favorite host plants, the Plantain. Common Plantain, *Plantago major* and its cousin Narrowleaf Plantain, *Plantago lanceolata* are weeds that interrupt the grass in a lawn with seed stalks that hold thousands of seeds. Plantain likes to establish itself along roads, wherever there may be disturbed soil. It's not only good for the Buckeye caterpillar. It carries calcium and vitamins A and C and can be eaten by humans. Folks look for the young, tender leaves for additions to their salads. *Linaria* (Toadflax) and *Antirrhinum* (Snapdragon) are also favored foods.

The Buckeye butterfly is an acrobatic dare-devil of a flyer compared to the leisurely up and down flutter pattern of the Monarch. The male often settles close to the ground, waiting for a female, but will give chase to anyone flying overhead! On top of being aggressive, they're also very skittish. That might be due to their extraordinary aerial skills. They might appear to be skittish when in reality, they simply move faster than other butterflies.

The beautiful Buckeye gives us another reason to refrain from our use of herbicidal lawn treatments. Perhaps, we might even taste a plantain!

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*Cori Westcott is president of Missouri Master Naturalist, Great Rivers Chapter and serves as a Habitat Advisor for St. Louis Audubon Society's Bring Conservation Home. Westcott also coordinates monitoring efforts in the Grand Glaize Creek watershed for Missouri Stream Team.*