Photo: Charlotte Pyle

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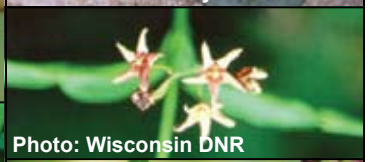
Photo: Wisconsin DNR

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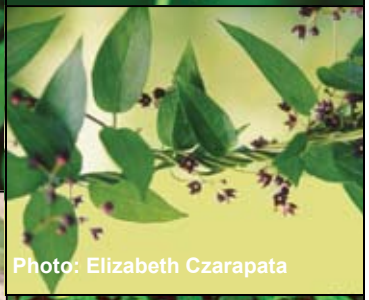
Photo: Elizabeth Czarapata

Photo: Charlotte Pyle

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Black and Pale Swallow-worts

Cynanchum louiseae (Vincetoxicum nigrum)
Cynanchum rossicum (Vincetoxicum rossicum)

Habit: Herbaceous perennials; range from 0.6-1.8 m (2-6 ft) tall.
Leaves: Simple, opposite, narrow, oblong to ovate with a pointed tip; dark green leaves with a smooth, waxy coating; emits a pungent herbal smell when crushed.
Stems: Twining; may climb or creep around adjacent plants.
Flowers: Small, five-petaled, clustered in leaf axils; bloom June-August; slight rotting odor; petal width about the same as length; *V. nigrum*: purple-black with straight white hairs on dorsal surface; *V. rossicum*: pale to dark maroon, purple or pink, glabrous; petal width less than length.
Fruits/seeds: Narrow elongate seedpod, 4-7 cm (1.5-2.75 in) in length, similar to milkweed or dogbane pods; contain numerous flat brown seeds with tufts of white fibers; split open in mid-summer to release wind-borne seeds.
Habitat: Found in hardwood forests, shaded woods, open prairies, fields, savannas, roadsides; can tolerate a range of light and soil conditions.
Reproduction: By seed; vegetatively by rhizomes and shoots from root crown of parent plant.
Similar species: Native dogbanes (*Apocynum* spp.) have similar seedpods but are not vines.
Comments: Native to Eurasia. Grows rapidly over native vegetation; wind-dispersed seed travels long distances. Toxins may pose a threat to grazing farm animals when incorporated into hay bales.
Monitoring & rapid response: Monitor disturbed sites and also edges and paths in undisturbed sites; populations most visible in late summer when the leaves turn golden and seedpods appear. Hand-pulling ineffective—dig out entire root crown; burn or place in landfill. Foliar herbicide treatment provides effective control; two applications needed in a year for large, monotypic stands. Prescribed fire is not effective when used alone and may improve conditions for increased germination; fire may be useful following herbicide application to control seedlings with less developed root systems. Remove and burn seedpods; multi-year monitoring and follow-up required.