

River Bend Naturalists Notebook

Presented by: RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER, Faribault, MN 55021

BLACK SUGAR MAPLE

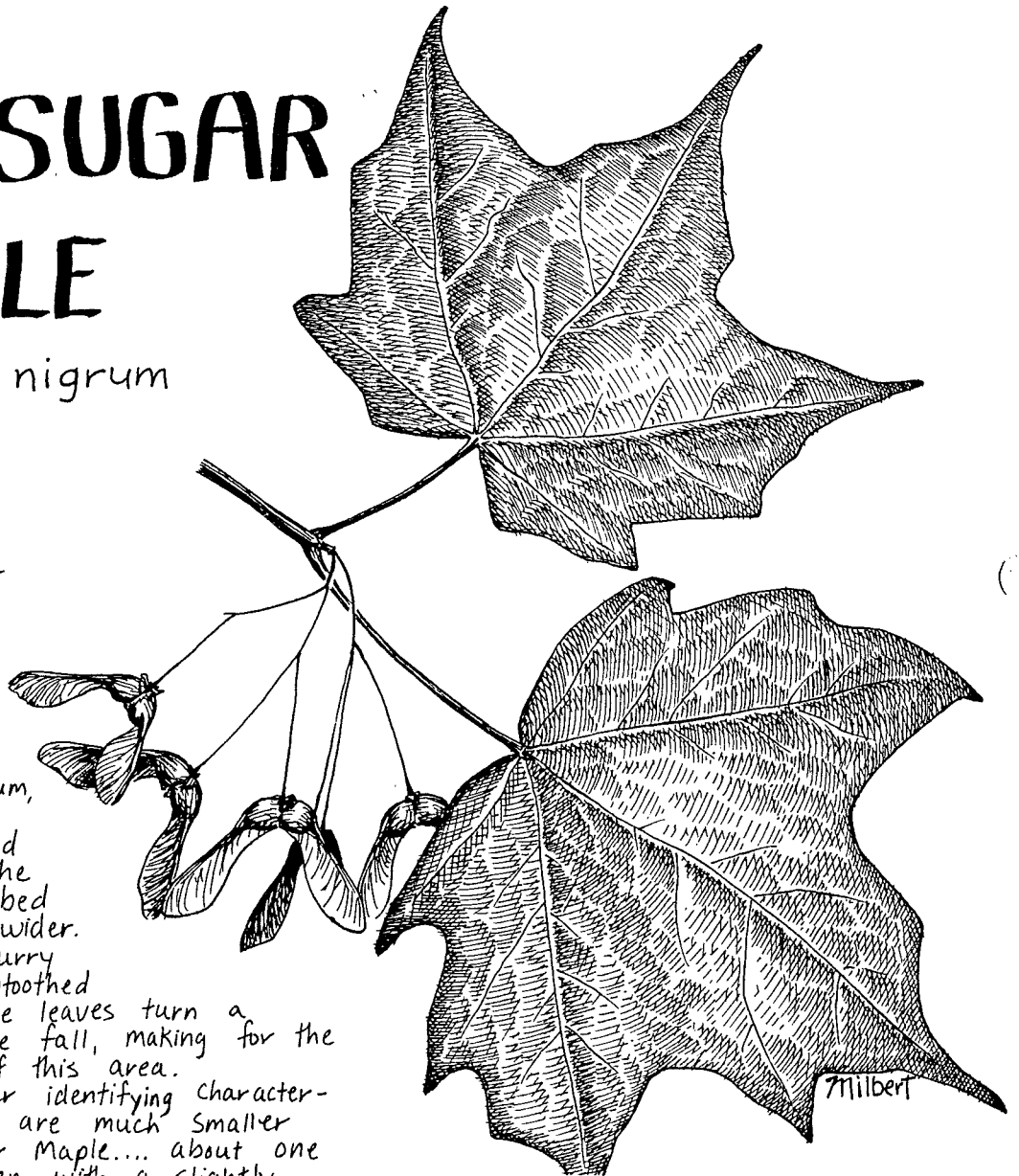
Acer saccharum nigrum

The most common maple tree at the River Bend Nature Center and in Rice county. It is a large, handsome, woodland shade tree, about as large as the Sugar Maple, usually with conspicuously dark bark ... thus the name (*Nigrum*, black).

The leaves are green and somewhat like those of the Sugar Maple, but three-lobed instead of five-lobed, and wider. Other differences include furry undersides and drooping untoothed margins. Black Sugar Maple leaves turn a beautiful red-orange in the fall, making for the gorgeous autumn colors of this area.

The fruit (seeds), another identifying characteristic of the Black Maple, are much smaller than those of the Sugar Maple... about one third in length, and often with a slightly larger seed cavity. When dry they turn a chocolate brown color.

Except for these differences, the Black and Sugar Maples are very similar. In fact some authorities treat them as varieties of a single species. Dense stands of either maple, called "sugar bushes", are tapped for sap in early Spring. The clear sap is boiled down to produce maple syrup at the rate of one gallon of Syrup per 30-35 gallons of Sap.



The Black Sugar Maple ranges over the northeastern United States into southern Minnesota. At the River Bend Nature Center it seems quite distinct as a species; however, northward in the Metro area it appears to grade into the Sugar maple.

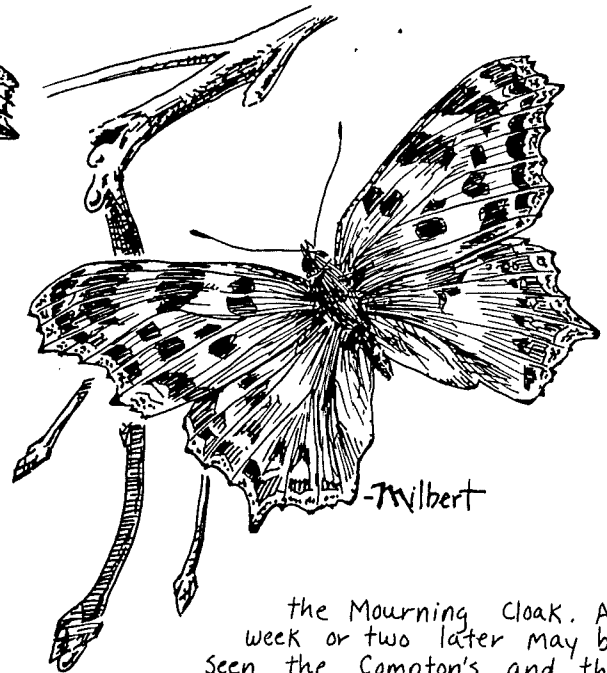
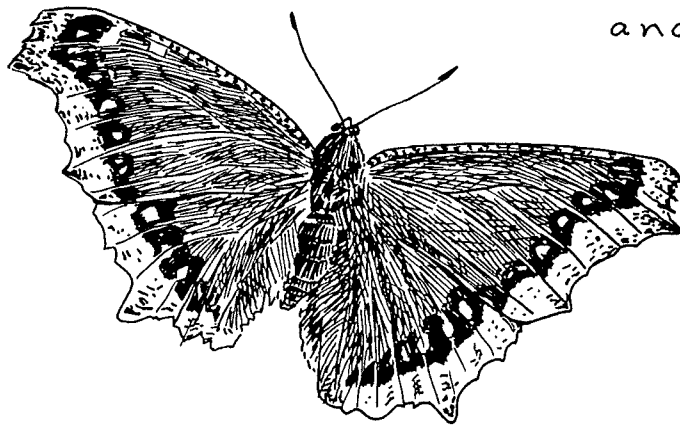
- Text by Orwin A. Rustad -

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MOURNING CLOAK BUTTERFLY

and TORTOISE SHELLS



The largest family of butterflies, sometimes called the four-footed butterflies, consists of the Mourning Cloak, American (Milbert's) Tortoise-shell, and Compton's Tortoise-shell, which are members of a genus (*Nymphalis*). As with all insects they have six legs, however their front legs are reduced in size and held against their body giving them the appearance of being four-legged (or four-footed). Tortoise Shells include butterflies that resemble Angle Wings but the inner margin of forewing is straight instead of concave. Members of this group, for the most part are large, colorful butterflies. The life-cycles of these three butterflies are similar in that all over-winter as adults hidden in crevices of rocks and bark. They emerge in spring on the first warm days when the temperature is about 60° F. or above, and feed on the sugary sap from broken Maple tree branches, or on nectar from early spring flowers.

The first butterfly to be seen in the Spring is

the Mourning Cloak. A week or two later may be seen the Compton's and the American Tortoise Shells. Almost any large butterfly seen in late winter or early spring will be one of these three. Look for them on the first warm days in deciduous forest habitat where they usually hibernate. As its name suggests, the Mourning Cloak is a dark butterfly; and the Compton's is the most colorful of the three.

— text by Orwin A. Rustad.