Invasive Species Alert

PALE SWALLOW-WORT

(CYNANCHUM ROSSICUM OR VINCETOXICUM ROSSICUM)

DETECTED IN MICHIGAN

IDENTIFICATION:

- An herbaceous, twining perennial vine growing up to 7 feet in length.
- Leaves are shiny medium-green to yellow and oval to heart-shaped with a pointed tip.
- Small, star-shaped flowers are pale pink to reddish brown with five petals and grow in clusters of six to 10 blooms.
- Seed pods are milkweed-like and full of flat, brown seeds covered in fine, white hairs.
- Unlike black swallow-wort, pale swallow-wort plants have no rhizomes and grow in clumps with many stems.

HABITAT: Pale swallow-wort is an upland vine tolerant of shade, sun and a variety of soil moistures. It is generally found in disturbed areas including old fields, woodlands and brushy areas but can invade perennial crops including pastures, tree farms and no-till fields. It thrives in the shallow soils and limestone bedrock of alvar areas and poses a threat to these rare ecosystems.

NATIVE RANGE: Ukraine and Southwestern Russia.

U.S. DISTRIBUTION: New England, Wisconsin, Indiana. Also Toronto, CA.

MICHIGAN DISTRIBUTION: Isolated populations in southern Michigan.

LOCAL CONCERN: Pale swallow-wort can form extensive patches that crowd out native plants and disrupt ecosystems. Seeds are carried on the wind or transported by water. Roots are toxic to mammals, including livestock. Plants are toxic to many insect larvae including monarch caterpillars.

REPORT THIS SPECIES: Visit MISIN.MSU.edu or download the MISIN smartphone app and report it from your phone.

Photos courtesy of Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org.