

## **SILPHIUM STEM GALL WASPS: LITTLE KNOWN PRAIRIE SPECIALISTS**

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*Abstract:* The original prairies of the Midwest have nearly vanished, and so too have many of the insects tied to prairie vegetation. In 1891, five species of gall-forming wasps, *Antistrophus* spp (Hymenoptera: Cynipidae), were described from various plants in the genus *Silphium* (compass plant, prairie dock, rosinweed, and cup plant) growing in Illinois prairies. These wasps are thought to live only in *Silphium* spp, which are characteristic plants of our Midwest prairies. *Silphium*s once dominated the landscape, but are now mostly limited to scattered remnants of original prairie and prairie plantings. For 100 years following their description, these wasps were paid very little attention. Then, in the early 1990s, two researchers began to take interest in the group, describing additional species and investigating their ecology and response to fire. However, the distribution and conservation status of *Silphium* gall wasps are still very much a mystery. Recently, two of the wasp species have been documented for the first time in WI. I will report on these findings, and what is known about the group. I will also solicit your help in documenting the distribution and status of these uncommon prairie specialists.