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LIVING

A May nature almanac

Although warm weather arrived early this year and greatly accelerated nature's timetable, the month of May usually begins with tree branches bare to the sky. However, as the trees leaf out, the spectrum of pastel greens, whites, browns and reds offers a colour spectacle that almost equals that of



OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Drew Monkman

fall — at least to those who take the time to appreciate its subtleties and nuances. When warm weather finally arrives, change occurs at a dizzying pace. Woodlots come alive with rafts of trilliums, fields glow with dandelion gold and roadsides and trails beckon us to savour the lovely fragrance of blooming lilacs. Southerly winds this month will push avian migrants north to take advantage of the billions of insects feasting on the smorgasbord of new leaves. The arrival of the

birds of May is no less than a reaffirmation of life.

This year, late April's unseasonably warm weather has meant that many events that usually occur in early or even mid-May have already taken place. However, I have still included them at their typical dates, partly to give people a sense of how abnormal this spring has been. It is also important to appreciate just how quickly climate change seems to be occurring. The box in front of each date can be used to check off the events that you witness. You may wish to write in the date, as well, since the date I've given is only an approximation.

□ 1 Watch for skeins of high-flying northern Canada geese passing as they make their way to nesting grounds on James Bay. Most are seen east of Peterborough.

□ 2 This is the time to see the "spring ephemeral" butterflies such as the olympia marble, the chryxus arctic and the elfins. Try Sandy Lake Road off of County Road 46.

□ 3 The white blossoms of serviceberries, also known as Juneberries, are a common site along country roadsides.

□ 4 Large, pregnant queen bumblebees forage at flowers and fly low over the ground, searching out an underground chamber in which to start a new colony.

□ 5 Hummingbirds return from the Yucatan and make a beeline to our feeders. Their natural food at this time includes tree sap oozing from sapsucker drillings.

□ 6 High in the NE, Ursa Major appears "upside down," with Polaris and Ursa Minor below it. Today is Astronomy Day, with special activities at the Centennial Museum.

□ 7 Blackflies are usually at their worst about now. One square metre of a fast-running stream can produce over 30,000 in a season.

□ 8 The long, fluid trill of the American toad is a characteristic sound of early May. The high-pitched song can be heard both day and night and often lasts up to 30 seconds without a break.

□ 9 Along trails and roadsides, watch for the light brown stems of horsetails (Equisetum) rising from the ground in colonies. Spore cones are visible on the tips.

□ 10 Sugar maples appear light yellow from the thousands of yellow flowers in bloom. Within a week or so, they will fall to leave a yellow floral confetti on the ground.

□ 11 The first dragonflies change from for-bidding aquatic nymphs to gracious adult flying machines. The first species seen is usually the common green darner, our only migratory species.

□ 12 The damp morning air is rich with the fragrance of balsam poplar resin, a characteristic smell of spring in the Kawarthas.

□ 13 With many species nesting, baby birds are inevitably found and believed to have been abandoned. Rarely is this the case. The cardinal rule is to leave them alone.



□ 14 The buck white-tailed deer's antler growth accelerates dramatically as a result of the increased daylight. Males keep a low profile at this time of year and allow does a wide berth.

□ 15 Songbird migration is at its peak. The greatest numbers of migrating warblers, vireos, thrushes, orioles and flycatchers pass through between May 10 and 25.

□ 16 Pin cherries bloom in mid-May at about the same time as lilacs. Mosquitoes become quite noticeable, too, since the males feed heavily on the nectar of cherry blossoms.

□ 17 Grey treefrogs, green frogs and bullfrogs join the amphibian chorus. Treefrogs

sound remarkably like birds and will even call during the day. Listen for them in suburban areas, too.

□ 18 The last frost in the Kawarthas usually occurs about May 18. Frost will generally not occur again until September, giving our area an average of 135 frost-free days.

□ 19 Woodlots display a profusion of wildflowers including yellow trout lily, large-flowered bellwort, spring beauty and, of course, white trillium.

□ 20 Migrating rose-breasted grosbeaks and indigo buntings sometimes show up at sunflower feeders, so keep your feeders stocked up at least until month's end.

□ 21 Tent caterpillar infestations reach



Terry Carpenter, special to The Examiner

A large-flowered bellwort (left), a common wildflower in Burnham Provincial Park and Heber Rogers Conservation area. Above, a Canadian tiger swallowtail butterfly.

epic proportions some years in late May. The eastern tent caterpillar builds a tent into which it retreats at night. Forest tent caterpillars do not make a tent. These are both native species and very rarely ever kill the tree that they feed upon.

□ 22 May is the time to see moose. More and more are being seen in northern Peterborough County, especially along County Road 507 near Pencil Lake. Algonquin Park is still the surest bet, however.

□ 23 Birders start looking and listening for the last of the warbler species to arrive, namely the blackpoll, mourning and Canada. The blackpoll is only passing through, however.

□ 24 Common nighthawks return to the Kawarthas. This species, which used to be common in downtown Peterborough, is suffering a major decline. It is still be found at Petroglyphs Provincial Park.

□ 25 White ash, American basswood and both red and white oak finally come into full leaf.

□ 26 Members of the sunfish family such as the smallmouth bass and the pumpkinseed begin to spawn.

□ 27 Trembling aspens release their seeds, filling the air with white "parachutes." The seeds of elms, Norway and silver maples spin to the ground as well.

□ 28 Frothy, white masses of spittle become a common sight on the stems of field plants. They are excreted by spittlebug nymphs, possibly as protection from predators.

□ 29 With many grasses now in bloom, grass pollen is a major irritant for allergy sufferers. Most pollen is released in the morning between 8 a.m. and noon when the anthers dry and burst open.

□ 30 White-tailed deer fawns are usually born in late May or early June.

□ 31 Canadian tiger swallowtail and black swallowtail butterflies appear by month's end. They are sometimes seen "puddling" for minerals along trails and dirt roads.

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