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# LIVING

# Spring, accelerated

Having practically taken us from winter directly into summer, the abnormally warm weather that arrived in the third week of April has greatly accelerated spring's



## OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Drew Monkman

timetable. Instead of May beginning with tree branches bare to the sky, we already have a number of tree and shrub species in leaf. Other events, too, 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

much earlier things have been this spring. The box in front of each date can be used to check off those events that you witness yourself.

□ **1** Watch for skeins of northern Canada geese passing over as they make their way to nesting grounds on James Bay. They fly considerably higher and in much larger flocks than our local geese. Most flocks of northerners are recorded east of Peterborough.

□ **2** A variety of interesting butterflies are already on the wing as May begins. These include the Compton tortoiseshell, the eastern comma and the mourning cloak. Try Sandy Lake Road off of County Road 46 north of Havelock as well as Petroglyphs Provincial Park.

□ **3** The yellow-gold flowers of marsh marigolds, also called cowslips, brighten wet habitats throughout the Kawarthas. Marigold patches are easy to see, even by speeding motorists glancing at roadside swamps such as those along University Road, just south of Nassau Mills Rd.

□ **4** Dragonflies are fascinating insects to observe and photograph. Right now, identification is fairly easy since only a limited number of species are flying. These include green darter, American emerald, Hudsonian whiteface, beaverpond baskettail and four-spotted skimmer.

□ **5** The early hours of this morning mark the peak of the Eta Aquarids meteor shower. However, viewing should be good on any morning from May 4 to 7. Meteor-watching is at its best after midnight. The Eta Aquarids are a light shower, averaging about 10 meteors per hour at their peak. Because the moon is new — it rises and sets during the daylight hours — viewing conditions are ideal. The dark skies should reveal even the faintest meteors.

□ **6** Make sure your hummingbird feeders are ready because the birds will be arriving back any day now, mostly from southern Mexico. To prepare nectar, mix one part sugar to four parts water and boil for one minute. The nectar can be stored in a refrigerator for later use.

□ **7** Blackflies are usually at their worst about now. In most species, the female requires a blood meal in order to get the required nutrients for egg development. Both the male and female also feed heavily on nectar to obtain the necessary energy for flying and mating.

## Unseasonably warm weather speeds up nature's timetable



Karl Egressy, special to The Examiner.

Despite the loud, ringing song, the ovenbird (left) is quite secretive. The female rose-breasted grosbeak looks like a big sparrow with an abnormally large beak.

□ **8** Calling both day and night in long, fluid trills, the American toad provides one of the most characteristic sounds of early May. When several males are calling together, each will sing at a slightly different pitch. To listen to this and other amphibian calls, go to [www.naturewatch.ca/](http://www.naturewatch.ca/). Then, click on frogwatch and field training.

□ **9** The spring azure is usually fairly common by the second week of May. Unlike mourning cloaks which overwinter as adults, the azure emerges from its chrysalis in spring — one of the very first butterflies to do so. This beautiful insect is blue above and white below.

□ **10** Drooping in tassel-like clusters, countless thousands of tiny yellow flowers decorate sugar maples. Most flowers have both male and female parts. The pistils, or female flowers, will produce clusters of plump, paired keys.

□ **11** Watch for fiddleheads emerging among the dead leaves of the forest floor. Actually the young, coiled leaves of the ostrich fern, fiddleheads resemble the scroll at the end of a violin. Nearly all ferns have fiddleheads, but those of the ostrich fern are the edible variety. They have been part of the culinary heritage of New Brunswickers since the late 1700s.

□ **12** The damp morning air is rich with the fragrance of balsam poplar resin, a characteristic smell of spring in the Kawarthas. You can rub the sticky buds of this common tree at any time of the year and be instantly transported through the sense of smell to a morning in May!

□ **13** With many species nesting, try to keep your cat indoors. It's no wonder so few baby robins ever make it to adulthood in Peterborough any more. It is estimated that literally hundreds of millions of birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians are killed by free-

roaming cats in North America each year.

□ **14** Mid-May is the peak of songbird migration with the greatest numbers of migrating warblers, vireos, thrushes, orioles and flycatchers passing through. Like cats, windows take a huge toll on migrating birds, many of which have threatened populations. If you have a window that birds often hit, drawing the blinds during the day or placing window decals or strands of ribbon outside the window can reduce collisions. The critical times for protecting migrants from windows are during May and September.

□ **15** Baby painted turtles emerge from their natal nests in the ground where they have overwintered since last fall when the eggs first hatched. For their first winter of life only, painted turtles are freeze-tolerant and can withstand temperatures that may fall to -11 C or below.

□ **16** Pin cherries bloom in mid-May at about the same time as lilacs. The five-petalled, white flowers are little more than a centimetre in diameter. A little later in the month, chokecherry blossoms appear. Their flowers are even smaller than those of the pin cherry and appear on a long, spike-like structure.

□ **17** Sounding remarkably like birds, gray treefrogs serenade us with their slow, musical trills. This species often calls during the day but is most vocal on warm, damp evenings.

□ **18** Our lakes receive a much-needed breath of oxygen during the so-called "spring turnover." In May, all of the water in a lake is briefly at the same temperature. This allows for a thorough mixing of the water and for oxygen from the air above to enter the lake.

□ **19** Blooming white trilliums blanket woodlots throughout the Kawarthas. The plant is well

named with its three leaves, three petals and three sepals. Red and painted trilliums are also in flower now in parts of our area.

□ **20** That large, streaked sparrow-like bird at your feeder is probably a female rose-breasted grosbeak. Just in from Costa Rica, grosbeaks are attracted to sunflower seeds. Last year at this time, we had 10 rose-breasted grosbeaks in our yard for three days.

□ **21** Eastern tent caterpillars emerge in mid-May from shiny egg masses wrapped tightly around the twig of a cherry or apple tree. Even though they may completely defoliate the tree, new leaves grow within a matter of weeks. Tent caterpillars are an important food for orioles and cuckoos.

□ **22** A large variety of mammals give birth this month. These include beavers, red squirrels, flying squirrels, otters, porcupines, groundhogs, skunks, deer and moose.

□ **23** Wild columbine is now in bloom on rocky hillsides and along roads and trails. The flowers, a beautiful blend of red and yellow, hang in a bell-like fashion and are often visited by hummingbirds.

□ **24** Common nighthawks return to the Kawarthas. Along with other species that feed on the wing such as swallows and swifts, this species is suffering a major decline. The nasal 'peent' of nighthawks calling on a summer evening was, until fairly recently, an integral part of the soundscape of downtown Peterborough. This voice has now fallen silent.

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

□ **26** Bass, bluegills and pumpkinseeds begin to spawn and are a common sight near docks.

□ **27** The seeds of elms, Norway and silver maples spin to the ground and often make for a lot or

raking to clean up.

□ **28** Woodlands across the Kawarthas resonate with the boisterous "teaCHER, teaCHER, teaCHER" song of the ovenbird as it claims its territory for the nesting season. The ovenbird gets its name from its nest which is on the ground and domed with leaves and debris. Together with the nest's side entrance, it reminded early naturalists of a Dutch oven.

□ **29** Look-alike alder and willow flycatchers are generally the last birds of spring migration to arrive back in the Kawarthas. They can only be told apart by voice.

□ **30** The cottony, white material floating on the May breeze and collecting on lawns and sidewalks might be mistaken for snow if it wasn't for the temperature. Instead, it is made up of tiny seeds, each attached to a bit of fluff, released by trembling aspen trees.

□ **31** The very conspicuous Canadian tiger swallowtail butterfly appears by month's end. Males spend much of the day patrolling in search of females and will fly the same route over and over.

## A special appeal

Given the serious decline in swallows, I'd be interested in knowing what is happening with swallow numbers around your property this spring. Are they up, down or about normal? Please email me.

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