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LIVING

Butterflies and bullfrogs

June brings long days, warm nights and a real sense of summer splendour

A pivotal celestial event takes place this month, one that unfortunately goes unnoticed by many. June 21 marks the summer solstice, the longest day of the year and the first official day of summer. From our perspective in Peterborough, we see the sun tracing its highest and longest arc through the sky. At noon, the sun beats down with full force from almost directly above our heads, heating the Earth much more efficiently than it does in December.



Drew Monkman
OUR CHANGING SEASONS

The sun's long path results in an extremely long day and a very short night. At the solstice, Peterborough receives an amazing 15 hours and 32 minutes of daylight. Compare this to a meager eight hours and 51 minutes on the first day of winter.

The significance of June's long, warm days is profound. All life responds. Tree leaves, for example, are now catching the concentrated energy of the June sun and converting it into phenomenal growth. You've no doubt noticed the incredible amount of growth that has already occurred in your garden and on your shrubs and trees this spring. New sugar maple shoots can easily put on half an inch of growth in a single day.

The following events in nature are typical of June in the Kawarthas. However, many of these occurrences are earlier than in an "average" year, as climate change continues to make its multiple impacts felt. Based on the increasingly early arrival of warm weather each spring, these dates may soon become the new norm.

- 1 A mysterious yellow dust covers cars, decks, picnic tables, and even shorelines as the male flowers of spruce and pine trees release their pollen to be spread by the wind. Pollen cones are usually yellow, orange or red and grow in clusters toward the base of new shoots.

- 2 Male hummingbirds can be seen doing their pendulum courtship flight, almost as if suspended from a string. They fly in wide arcs above and to both sides of the female.

- 3 The first monarch butterflies - the "grandchildren" of the monarchs that flew south last fall - are usually seen sometime during the first half of June. Last weekend, I saw my first monarch of the year near Rondeau Provincial Park on Lake Erie.

- 4 Osprey eggs hatch about now. The eggs do not hatch all at once; instead the first chick hatches out up to five days before the last one. The older chick dominates its younger siblings, and often eats the lion's share of the food. Younger siblings may die if food is scarce.

- 5 Watch for turtles laying their eggs in the sandy margins of roadsides and rail-trails. Remember to slow down when driving through turtle-crossing zones and, if safe, help the reptile across the road.

- 6 Giant silk moths take wing in June. They include the Cecropia, Polyphemus, Prometheus, Luna, and the



A female snapping turtle searches for a place to lay her eggs.

small, but spectacular, Io moth. The males have large, feather-like antennae that are sensitive to airborne sex-attractants called pheromones. This chemical communication system allows a male to find a female at distances of up to several kilometres!

- 7 Orchids bloom this month. Already in bloom are both the yellow and the pink lady's-slippers. By mid-month, the spectacular showy lady's slipper should also be flowering.

- 8 Now is the time we see the largest butterfly of the summer, the tiger swallowtail, flitting about our gardens and fields. It resembles a tiger in its yellow and black

colouration and a swallow's tail in the shape of the wing extensions. It is often attracted to mud puddles where it ingests salts and amino acids.

- 9 Female balsam poplars, trembling aspens and various willows are now releasing their airborne seeds. They are carried long distances on white, silky hairs. The "fluff" collects on lawns and looks like a mid-June snowstorm has hit. They do not cause allergic reactions.

- 10 Drooping clusters of aromatic, white blossoms hang from nearly every twig of black locust trees for a week or so this month. An infusion made from the heavenly-smelling flowers has long been used in natural pharmacy. A non-native species, this tree originates from the central and southern Appalachians.

- 11 Pay attention to how the mix of species of roadside flowers changes over the course of the spring, summer and fall. By early to mid-June, ox-eye daisy, dame's-rocket, goat's-beard, bladder campion and yellow hawkweed are usually in bloom.

- 12 When the weather is dry enough, the first cut of hay will take place. Unfortunately, this often results in the deaths of baby birds such as bobolinks which nest in hay fields. The bobolink may soon be added to Canada's list of species at risk. The population has declined 88% since the 1960s.

- 13 June is the time of peak nesting activity for many bird species but espe-



KARL EGRESSY photo



Baby loons (top photo) usually hatch in the last week of June or early July, while the tiger swallowtail butterfly (above) and pink lady's slipper (right) are already here.



cially for migrants from the tropics. Most songbirds spend about two weeks incubating the eggs and another two weeks feeding the young before they leave the nest. Keep your cat indoors.

- 19 The green frog's banjo-like "poink" is a widespread sound in wetlands both day and night.

- 20 Observing bats can be a fascinating activity on a warm June evening. The large reservoir at Jackson's Park is often a good location. Bat detectors are helpful devices for identifying bats in the wild because each different species has its own characteristic call.

- 21 Today marks the summer solstice. Over the next few days, try to determine exactly where the sun rises as seen from a given window in your home. Then, over the next six months, watch how the sunrise point moves further and further south, right up to the winter solstice. There is a great sense of satisfaction in observing the endless cycle of the seasons as you watch the sun advance to a specific point on the horizon - and no further - and then double back and retrace its steps in the opposite direction.

- 22 Common elderberries and cat-tails, bloom along wetland edges.

- 23 The living lights of fireflies appear in late June. A type of beetle, fireflies produce a heatless light in their abdomen by combining a chemical called luciferin with luciferase (an enzyme) and oxygen. The light brings males and females together.

- 24 The summer stars have arrived. The three stars of the Summer Triangle - Vega, Deneb and Altair - can be seen low in the eastern sky soon after dark.

- 25 Baby loons usually hatch in the last week of June or the first week of July. Bird Studies Canada is looking for volunteers to monitor the numbers and breeding success of loons on lakes across Canada. Cottagers' participation is essential. Google Canadian Lakes Loon Survey for more information. You may also call 1-888-448-2473.

- 26 Tonight marks the full moon. The Algonquin First Nations knew it as the Strawberry Moon, while in Europe it was called the Rose Moon.

- 27 With nesting duties completed, crows and red-winged blackbirds reform flocks.

- 28 Butterfly-watching is usually at its most productive in early summer since the greatest number of species are flying at this time. Tiger swallowtails, white admirals and European skippers are particularly noticeable.

- 29 St. John's wort is in bloom. Brought to North America from Europe, it got its name because it flowers in June and was traditionally harvested on St. John's Day, June 24. This, of course, coincides with the summer solstice. St. John's wort was thought to be imbued with the power of the sun.

- 30 Aquatic insects are very active and plentiful, making this a great time of year for pond or creek studies. Lots of interesting critters can be found under the rocks in Jackson's Creek.

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