

localnews

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LIVING

Can't fool April – or can you?

Effects of early warm weather will be tracked as real month of spring unfolds

Normal spring weather seems to be back on track this week as we enjoy what amounts to our second spring of the season. Spring's initial arrival three weeks ago – actually, it was more like summer – broke just about every record going, be it record warmth or record early events in our flora and fauna. Many events that are more typical of mid-April like frogs and salamanders breeding and elm and alder trees flowering were triggered by the unsettling warmth of the week of March 19.



Drew Monkman
OUR CHANGING SEASONS

A return to cold weather, however, stopped many of these events in their tracks. It will be interesting to see if events like the frog chorus and breeding activity will simply start up where it fell 20 days ago. I will also be interested to see how the return to cold weather (-9 C on several nights) will have affected emerging leaves and flowers, especially on those species that saw their buds open almost six weeks ahead of schedule. For example, the March heat wave caused the leaves on my black cherry trees to start emerging and the flower buds on my serviceberry bushes to swell and open. Both of these events usually happen in May for these species.

This week in my list of typical events for the coming month, I have recommended a number of YouTube videos that readers can watch in order to see and here the various species described. YouTube (www.youtube.com) is an amazing resource for anyone interested in nature and a great way to learn animal sounds. The dates and occurrences listed below are typical of April in the Kawarthas.

APRIL COUNTDOWN

• 1 - With last week's bout of cold weather now behind us, local wetlands should be reawakening to the calls of chorus frogs, spring peepers, wood frogs and leopard frogs. Even though many species of frogs became active during the record heat of mid-March, they sometimes peck aggressively at windrows and car mirrors during the nesting season. Being very territorial birds, they instinctively attack other individuals of the same species – in this case, their reflected image – in an attempt to drive the "invader" out of their nesting territory. The simplest solution to this problem is to tape a piece of cardboard over the section of the outside of the window where the bird is pecking. (YouTube: Robin Pecking at Window)

• 2 - The bulk of migrating waterfowl have now moved through the Kawarthas Lakes as a result of the record early ice-out. However, it's still worth it checking local lakes and rivers (including Little Lake in Peterborough) for migrating loons and grebes.

• 3 - April is a very busy time for feeders. North-bound tree sparrows, juncos and fox sparrows are still moving through the Kawarthas and often appear at feeders. Listen for male juncos singing their musical trill.

• 4 - Mild, rainy nights in early to mid-April are usually the time when salamanders make their way to breeding ponds. They can often be seen by driving very slowly along back roads that pass through low woodlands with nearby swampy areas or flooded ditches. The north end of Camp Line in



DREW MONKMAN Special to The Examiner



JOHN URQUHART Special to The Examiner

Bright yellow coltsfoot (top) is now flowering along local roadsides. Venture out to bogs and wetlands and you'll likely hear a spring peeper (above) among the frog chorus. A highlight of April is the aerial mating display of the killdeer (right).



TONY BEGG Special to The Examiner

Douro-Dummer is often a good spot. However, because there were several nights of record early breeding activity in March this year, the breeding season may already have finished.

• 5 - Watch for the yellow, dandelion-like flowers of coltsfoot growing along roadsides such as the south side of Parkhill Rd., east of Brealey Dr.

CRAZY ABOUT NESTING

• 6 - Half-crazed cardinals and robins sometimes peck aggressively at windrows and car mirrors during the nesting season. Being very territorial birds, they instinctively attack other individuals of the same species – in this case, their reflected image – in an attempt to drive the "invader" out of their nesting territory. The simplest solution to this problem is to tape a piece of cardboard over the section of the outside of the window where the bird is pecking. (YouTube: Robin Pecking at Window)

• 7 - Rainbow trout leave Lake Ontario to move upstream to spawn in the shallow riffles of streams on the Oak Ridges Moraine. They are a spectacular sight as they jump up the fish ladder on the Ganaraska River in Port Hope. The ladder is located under the 401 bridge and can be accessed from County Rd. 28 in Port Hope by taking Molson St. and then Cavan.

• 8 - Today is Easter, an event always celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. The Christian Easter was preceded by a pagan festival celebrating fertility and new growth. Easter's date reminds us of how closely ancient peoples tracked the phases of the moon.

• 9 - Watch for early butterflies that overwintered as adults. These include the eastern comma (mostly orange with deeply sculpted wings) and the mourning cloak (dark with yellow edged wings). They are often seen basking in the sun on dirt roads. Monarchs won't arrive back in the Kawarthas until June. (YouTube: 5 Minutes Outdoors: Mourning Cloak Butterfly).

ROBINS SETTLE IN

• 10 - Close to 30 species of local birds are already nesting this month. Among these is the American robin. The female (the one with the dull orange breast) selects the nest site and does most of the nest building. Robins have two and even three clutches of eggs each year.

• 11 - Eastern garter snakes are active once again and preoccupied with the business of mating. When a receptive female appears, all of the males in the vicinity will converge on her in a spaghetti-like knot of snakes.

• 12 - Woodpeckers are very vocal this

month as they advertise ownership of breeding territories. Listen for the raucous "kwikwkwikwkw" of the northern flicker – a "song" that lasts for up to 15 seconds. (YouTube: Northern Flicker calling and drumming)

• 13 - Last spring's beaver cuts are driven from the parental pond and forced to wander widely in search of a new territory.

BATS TAKE FLIGHT

• 14 - Bats come out of hibernation and take flight on mild evenings. Females move to maternity roosts, where they will give birth in late May or June.

• 15 - Hepatica are usually the first woodland wildflowers to bloom in the spring. The flowers can be pink, white or mauve in colour. Look for them on south facing forest hillsides, sometimes right at the base of a large tree.

• 16 - When water temperatures reach 7 C, walleye begin to spawn. Along with white suckers, they can sometimes be seen spawning at night at Lock 19 in Peterborough or below the pedestrian bridge in Young's Point. Take along a strong beamed flashlight.

• 17 - Despite the saying "April showers bring May flowers," this is not a month of heavy precipitation in the Kawarthas. April precipitation is well below the monthly average for the year.

• 18 - The muffled drumming of the ruffed grouse is one of the most characteristic sounds of April. The birds drum to advertise territorial claims and to attract a female. (YouTube: Ruffed Grouse Drumming)

• 19 - On average, most local lakes are ice free by this date. 2012, however, saw many of the Kawarthas Lakes completely open by March 22.

• 20 - Listen for the cacophony of alarm and contact calls made by American robins at dusk as they prepare to roost for the night. Some scientists speculate that all the commotion may have something to do with competition between robins for the best roost spots.

EARTH DAY EVENTS

• 21 - With this being Earth Day week-end, Oranchoe Conservation has once again organized an annual Jackson Creek Clean Up. Meet at the Monaghan Road entrance to the park at 10 a.m., rain or shine. You'll be provided with bags and gloves. Be sure to wear boots.

• 22 - Low in the evening twilight, watch for the beautiful waxing crescent moon with "earthshine" faintly illuminating the moon's dark, left-hand side. The bright "star" just below the moon is the planet, Jupiter.

• 23 - The courtship flight of the American woodcock provides nightly entertainment in damp, open field habitats throughout the Kawarthas. Listen for their nasal Apeep@ call which begins just before dark. When the male launches itself into the air, you should be able to hear the twittering of the wings as the bird climbs high overhead. This is followed by a warbled "kissing" sound when it descends. (YouTube: American Woodcock Air Dance)

• 24 - Mars is easy to find, high overhead, in the spring constellation known as Leo, the Lion. It is the bright, orange "star" near Regulus, the so-called "heart of the lion".

BLOODROOT BLOOMS

• 25 - Bloodroot joins the wildflower parade about now. Eight large white petals make it stand out, as do the large, deeply cut lobes. The juice from the root was used as a body paint and dye by Native Americans.

• 26 - After a winter in the southern United States, yellow-rumped warblers return to the Kawarthas. The male is conspicuous in his blue grey back, leathers, black breast and yellow patches on the rump, sides and crown.

• 27 - If the weather is warm, the first spring azure (small and pale blue) and elfin (small and brown) butterflies are seen.

• 28 - White throated sparrows are passing through and are easily attracted to feeders if you put seed on the ground. They're also a great intro into the world of birds, since the wavering whistle of their Oh Sweet Canada Canada song is one of the easiest to learn. (YouTube: White-throated Sparrow: Whistler of the North)

• 29 - The first tropical migrants are arriving back from central and South America. Among those to be expected right now are northern waterthrush, broad-winged hawk, and chimney swift.

• 30 - Venus is at its maximum brightness. It might be hard to tell, however, because the planet is always the brightest object in the sky, after the moon.

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