

localnews

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LIVING

Abundance begins in June

Birds nest, fish spawn and moths and butterflies emerge from their cocoons

Even during a time of climate change (or climate disruption as many are now calling it), we should not expect that each and every month will be warmer than average. Looking back over the past three months in Peterborough, March and May were very close to the 1971-2000 average, while April was actually about 0.7 C cooler. The fact remains, however, that 16 of the past 28 months have been 1.3 C or more warmer than usual.



DREW MONKMAN

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Our perception of this warming trend, however, becomes confused by the day-to-day vagaries in the weather such as the abnormally cool conditions we had last weekend. Remember, weather is what tells us if we should grab an umbrella or put on a sweater when we head out the door, while climate tells us what species of tree to plant or whether to buy a snow shovel. Climate, therefore, is basically long-term, statistical weather and not the day-by-day "noise." As humans, we struggle at times to tell the difference. Keeping in mind that long-term forecasting is not always accurate, Environment Canada is calling for above average temperatures for June and July.

For this month's nature almanac, I've decided to divide the month up into early, mid-, and late June, instead of organizing the events by day. However, many of the happenings are not restricted to just one part of the month.

EARLY JUNE

- The yellow dust that has been descending from the sky and covering everything from cars and decks to puddles and shorelines is mostly pollen from the male flowers that cover the boughs of pines right now. Each pollen grain has two air bubbles to make it light enough to be carried by the wind to facilitate the fertilization of female cones.



JOE CROWLEY photo

- 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. If you have turtles nesting on your property, consider protecting their eggs from predators by building a turtle nest cage. For construction details, go to bit.ly/Kv1UQT

- With monarchs back any day now, make sure you have some milkweed in your garden - or simply left growing wild on your property - to provide these butterflies with plants to lay their eggs on. Common milkweed, swamp milkweed and butterfly milkweed are all good choices.

- Two nature-rich destinations for a June walk are the Harold Town Conservation Area on the Old Norwood Road and the newly completed Lang-Hastings section of the Trans-Canada Trail.



DANIELLE TASSIE photo

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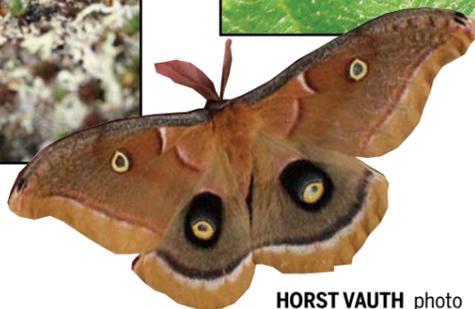


DREW MONKMAN photo



Wikipedia photo

Signs that June has arrived include (clockwise from top left) turtles laying eggs in roadside nests (so watch out for them); pollen, like these grains on developing white pine cones; the elegant and common ebony jewelwing damselfly; the very large cecropia moth; and the five-lined skink.



HORST VAUTH photo

Don't forget your binoculars.

- Giant silk moths are emerging from their cocoons and then flying off to look for mates. The females attract males by releasing airborne sex pheromones in extremely small quantities. The large, feathery-looking antennae of the males are able to detect these chemical molecules as far as five kilometres away! The most commonly seen species in our area is the Cecropia moth.

- Two species of sunfish, the pumpkinseed and the bluegill, are spawning. The males can be easily seen guarding their shallow-water nests. If a female should appear, you can sometimes see the courtship between the pair as they swim in a circular path, side by side, with their bellies touching.

MID-JUNE

- Orchids bloom this month. The first

to flower are the yellow and the pink lady's-slippers. By the third week of the month, the spectacular showy lady's slipper should also be in bloom.

- A signature scent of the June air comes courtesy of the wonderfully aromatic white blossoms of the black locust. One good location for locusts in Peterborough is just south of the intersection of Wallis Dr. and Merino Rd.

- June is peak nesting season. We often forget that nests are a marvel of architecture and ingenious use of materials. Hummingbird nests incorporate small pieces of beautiful green lichens; Chimney Swifts construct a fragile, saucer-like structure of twigs that are held together by saliva; and Ovenbirds build a dome with a side entrance that makes it resemble a Dutch oven. You can help nesting birds by keeping your cat indoors.

- It is interesting to watch the roadside flowers change over the course of the spring, summer and fall. By mid-June, ox-eye daisy, dame's-rocket, goat's-beard, bladder campion and yellow hawkweed are usually in bloom.

- In the downtown core of Peterborough, Chimney Swifts are putting on quite a show this month. Pairs can be seen and heard in courtship flight as they raise their wings and glide in a V position. To see swifts in flight, go to: bit.ly/Jvaell

- Balsam poplars, which have been scented the May air, release their seeds. Each tiny seed is attached to a tuft of long, white silky hair, which is perfectly adapted for long distance dispersal by the wind. The white seed tufts sometimes cover the ground in such numbers that they create the illusion of a summer snowstorm.

- Aquatic invertebrates are very active and plentiful, making this a great time of year for pond studies. Lots of interesting critters can be found under the rocks in Jackson's Creek. A good on-line identification guide can be found at bit.ly/ixTol

- 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, a species at risk.

LATE JUNE

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

- The summer solstice occurs on June 21 at 1:04 a.m. The sun will rise and set farther north than on any other day of the year. At about 1 p.m., it is at its highest point in the sky of the entire year and therefore casts the year's shortest shadows. Go out and measure your shadow. If you measure it again on Dec. 21, you'll be astounded by the difference.

- On clear, dark summer nights, the white swath of starlight from the Milky Way is at its most impressive. This is because, in summer, we are facing our galaxy's densely star-studded centre.

- Don't miss the living lights of fireflies that appear in late June. These beetles (not flies) produce a heatless light in their abdomen by combining a chemical called luciferin with luciferase (an enzyme) and oxygen. Like bird song, the lights are used to attract a mate. The Parkway Trail between Chemong Rd. and Hilliard St. can be a good place to see fireflies.

- 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.

- The music of June nights is provided courtesy of the gray treefrog. Listen for its melodious, two-second bursts of bird-like trills.

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

- June is a great time to visit wetlands, lakeshores and sometimes just your own garden to look for dragonflies and damselflies. Different species emerge at different times. In late June, watch for dragonflies such as the chalk-fronted skimmer, four-spotted skimmers and common whitetail. Two of the most often-seen damselflies are the ebony jewelwing and the Hagen's bluet.

- The roadside parade of blooming plants now includes common milkweed, viper's-bugloss, white sweet clover, birdsfoot trefoil and chicory - all non-native plants.

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