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# LIVING

## An early-spring almanac

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Each month of the year has its own natural identity. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said of his friend, the great American naturalist Henry David Thoreau, that "if Thoreau waked up from a trance in this swamp, he could tell by the plants what time of year it was within two days." The dates and events below represent some of the typical occurrences in nature during early spring in the Kawarthas. Hopefully, they will whet your appetite to take a closer look and listen each day to what is happening around you. Obviously, what is written for one date will also apply to nearby dates. In some cases the particular event may take place over a number of weeks. Most of these happenings can be observed right in your own backyard or neighbourhood. Others may require a short drive. As you develop a keener sense of observation, each walk and outing will be of more interest. The box in front of each date can be used to check off the events that you witness.



**OUR CHANGING SEASONS**  
Drew Monkman

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### March

- ☐ 21- Yesterday marked the vernal equinox or first day of spring. With sunrise at 6:16 a.m. and sunset at 6:23 p.m., we enjoyed just over 12 hours of daylight.
- ☐ 23 - Foot-long, glossy-purple grackles have returned and are by now a common bird in most neighbourhoods. Listen for their raspy "chack" call and watch how the males puff up their feathers as part of their courtship display.
- ☐ 24 - Large numbers of migrating waterfowl can usually be found on open lakes and rivers including Little Lake. Ring-necks, common mergansers, hooded mergansers and buffleheads are among the most common species.
- ☐ 25 - The grey, furry buds of the aspen are now a common sight. The aspen is a close relative of the pussy willow.
- ☐ 26 - The first small flocks of tree swallows can usually be seen flying low over the Otonabee or Little Lake. Occasionally a barn swallow may be seen with them.
- ☐ 27 - On days when the temperature climbs above 10 C, watch for the first mourning cloak butterflies to take flight. The wings are purplish black with a yellow border.
- ☐ 28 -Turkey vultures have returned. They can be identified at a distance by their somewhat clumsy, unsteady flight pattern. The birds tend to rock from side to side.
- ☐ 29 - Red-winged blackbirds have once again repopulated local wetlands.
- ☐ 30 - The leaves of wild leeks, often poking through patches of late March snow, are often the first sign of new herbaceous plant growth. They are common in woodlands.
- ☐ 31- If the weather is exceptionally mild, the first frogs may begin to call. Turtles may also emerge from hibernation and garter snakes may become active.

### April

- ☐ 1 - In the early evening, the constellation Leo looms over the southeastern sky while Orion rules the west. The bright, orange star, Arcturus, reigns in the east.
- ☐ 2 - Daylight Savings Time begins today. "Spring" ahead one hour. Sunset will not be until 7:40 p.m. and evening twilight will linger until after 8 p.m.
- ☐ 3 - If you are lucky, your feeder may be graced by the visit of a large, thrush-like fox sparrow. This species is a deeper, richer brown than other sparrows.
- ☐ 4 - Northward-bound American tree sparrows and dark-eyed juncos move through



the Kawarthas in large numbers. Juncos can be especially abundant.

- ☐ 5 -The bright red flowers of the red maple stand out in swampy areas. In the city, the small, greenish-yellow flowers of the closely-related silver maple are easily seen.
- ☐ 6 -Don't be surprised if a half-crazed robin or cardinal pecks aggressively at one of your windows for days on end. He's only trying to drive away an invader - his own reflected image - from his territory.
- ☐ 7 - Early spring is the best time of the year to see the silvery ring of a lunar halo. Evenings when the temperature is a few degrees above zero are best.
- ☐ 8 - Coltsfoot, with its dandelion-like yellow flowers, should be in bloom. Look for it growing on the shoulder and in ditches of roadsides.
- ☐ 9 - The morning chorus of robins, cardinals, song sparrows, chickadees, house finches, mourning doves, starlings, grackles and crows can be deafening!
- ☐ 10 - Robins and grackles are busy gathering nesting materials.
- ☐ 11- Flocks of thousands of migrating tree swallows are often seen over the Otonabee River and adjacent areas including downtown Peterborough.
- ☐ 12 - Last year's baby muskrats are obliged to leave home and to find their own territory. Many unfortunately end up as roadkill.



Terry Carpenter, special to The Examiner

Melting ice and snow in early spring often create temporary streams and waterfalls (left). Bloodroot (above) often bloom in the last few days of April.

the ice has been going out earlier.

- ☐ 21 - White-throated sparrows are passing through and are easily attracted to feeders if you put seed on the ground. Listen for their "Oh sweet Canada" song.
- ☐ 22 - Yellow-bellied sapsuckers are very noisy this month. Listen especially for their courtship drumming on dead, dry trees or metal surfaces such as drain pipes.
- ☐ 23 - The courtship flight of the American woodcock provides nightly entertainment in damp, open field habitats such as the area near the Peterborough Airport.
- ☐ 24 - In areas where birch and aspen grow, watch for The Infant, a small, early spring geometer moth with orange and black hindwings.
- ☐ 25 - Woolly bear caterpillars become active once again. They will soon pupate in a cocoon made from their own hairs and emerge as white Isabella moths.
- ☐ 26 - The first flocks of "Northern" Canada geese heading for James Bay pass over. They fly at higher altitudes and in much larger numbers than our local geese.
- ☐ 27- Large, pregnant queen bumblebees set out to begin a family. They fly low to the ground in search of a hole or burrow to claim for a home. The female actually makes a small ball of grasses and mosses in which to deposit her eggs.
- ☐ 28 - Leopard frogs have added their voices to the amphibian chorus. They sound like a short, rattling "snore" followed by guttural chuckling.
- ☐ 29 - The pace of migration is accelerating with the arrival of the first migrants from the neo-tropics. Watch for the first chimney swifts in downtown Peterborough.
- ☐ 30 - The first woodland wildflowers bloom. These usually include hepatica, bloodroot and violets. In sandy Shield locations near pines, look for trailing arbutus.

**Drew Monkman is a Peterborough teacher and author of Nature's Year in the Kawarthas. He can be reached at [dmonkman1@cogeco.ca](mailto:dmonkman1@cogeco.ca). Terry Carpenter is an award-winning local nature photographer. Go to [www3.sympatico.ca/terrycarpenter/](http://www3.sympatico.ca/terrycarpenter/) to see more of his photographs and to contact him.**