

localnews

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LIVING

Spring returns to its roots

Seemingly cool March was really just the norm, now April can warm things up

According to Dave Phillips of Environment Canada, the wintery weather we have experienced this March is historically quite normal and unremarkable. "Compared to last year, it's been a good old fashioned winter," he said. "It's not a conspiracy or end of climate change; it's just the kind of spring closer to normal than last year." In fact, Peterborough's daily mean temperature for March has only been about half a degree colder than the 1971 - 2000 average. Forecasters are calling for a warm April and a warmer than average summer.



DREW MONKMAN

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

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

- 1 - Today is Easter Monday. Easter is always celebrated on the weekend after the first full moon following the spring equinox. The Christian Easter was preceded by a pagan festival celebrating fertility and new growth and reminds us of how closely ancient peoples tracked the phases of the moon.

- 2 - Northward-bound waterfowl are still moving through the Kawarthas. Little Lake Cemetery, the Otonabee River, Gannon's Narrows, the north shore of Rice Lake and the meltwater pond at Mather's Corners near Keene can be good places to see them. A spotting scope comes in handy at some locations.

- 3 - Clouds of strange crustaceans known as fairy shrimp (genus Eubranchipus) can often be seen in meltwater pools and ponds immediately after the snow and ice disappear.

- 4 - Mild, rainy nights in early to mid-April are usually the time when salamanders like the blue-spotted make their way to woodland breeding ponds.

YELLOW ON ROADSIDE

- 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. Only later in the spring will the hoof-shaped leaves appear.

- 6 - Local wetlands should soon be reawakening to the boisterous calls of chorus frogs, spring peepers, wood frogs and leopard frogs. (YouTube: "Spring Peeper Frogs - CNaturalist Online")

- 7 - April is sparrow month at feeders. Northward bound tree, white-throated and fox sparrows are moving through the Kawarthas and join our local song and chipping sparrows for a handout. Be sure to scatter some finch mix or niger seed on the ground.

- 8 - Vernal ponds - small, temporary bodies of spring meltwater and rain, located in depressions in the forest floor or adjacent fields - create crucially important breeding habitat for frogs,



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toads and salamanders.

- 9 - Half-crazed cardinals and robins sometimes make repeated flights up against house windows during the nesting season. Being very territorial birds, they instinctively attack other individuals of the same species - in this case, their reflected image! (YouTube: "Red Cardinal Flying into Window")

- 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.

- 11 - The male catkins on speckled alder bushes should now be swelling into long, caterpillar-like garlands of yellow and purple. They release golden puffs of pollen when jostled. Look for alders along the margins of wetlands.

WAXING MOON

- 12 - Low in the evening twilight, watch for the beautiful waxing crescent moon with "earthshine" faintly illuminating the moon's dark, left-hand side. The earthshine affect should be visible for the next few days.

- 13 - The smell of early spring is in the air. It is a blend of the earthy smell of soil, leaf mould, earthworms, and the first spicy odours of swelling balsam poplar buds.

- 14 - Dark brown false morel

(Gyromitra esculenta) mushrooms begin to appear in

woodlands. False morels have a wrinkled, brain-like appearance and are poisonous.

- 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.

LEAPING TROUT

- 16 - Rainbow trout leave Lake Ontario this month to spawn in 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 bridge over the 401. Call 1-888-767-8467 for more information.

- 17 - A pastel wash of swelling buds and emerging tree flowers spreads over the landscape, giving distant trees a soft, hazy appearance. In the city, watch for the red-green flowers of the silver maple.

- 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: "Voices: Ruffed Grouse")

- 19 - Butterflies that overwintered as adults are sometimes seen flying or feeding at sap flows. Watch for the eastern comma (mostly orange) and the mourning cloak (dark with yellow-

edged wings). (YouTube: 5 Minutes Out-Doors: Mourning Cloak Butterfly)

- 21 - The Lyrids meteor shower usually peaks over the next two nights. It can be seen in the northeast and is best after midnight. You can expect about 20 meteors per hour at their peak.

- 22 - As a personal Earth Day project, why not take some time to learn the most common city bird songs. Begin with the American robin, the mourning dove, the cardinal and the song sparrow. All can be heard by Googling "all about birds", searching the on-line bird guide and scrolling down to "Sound" for each species.

- 23 - Just before darkness falls, the courtship flight of the male American woodcock provides nightly entertainment in damp fields, adjacent to woodlands. Listen for a nasal Apeent@ call, the twittering of the wings as the bird takes off and flies overhead, a "kissing" sound as he descends, a period of silence as he lands, and finally peenting sounds once again when he's back on the ground. (YouTube: "American Woodcock Air Dance")

LOOK FOR LOONS

- 24 - Common loons take up residence on our lakes as soon as the ice goes out.

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

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Spring in the Kawarthas is marked by nature's great awakening and return. Among the markers of spring to look for are (counter clockwise from above) the ruffed grouse, spring peeper, coltsfoot, blue-spotted salamander, and false morel, which is poisonous and should be seen but not eaten.



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- 26 - After a winter in the southern United States, yellow-rumped warblers return to the Kawarthas. The male is quite stunning in his blue-gray back feathers, 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 - Watch and listen for ruby-crowned kinglets. Smaller than a chickadee, this hyperactive grey bird sings a surprisingly loud, boisterous song. (YouTube: Ruby-crowned Kinglet)

- 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 - Among the various trees and shrubs flowering in the second half of April, we usually find red maple, Manitoba maple and American elm.

Drew Monkman is a retired Peterborough teacher and author of *Nature's Year: Changing Seasons in Central and Eastern Ontario*. He can be reached at dmonkman1@cogeco.ca. Visit his website and see past columns at www.drew-monkman.com