



The Leaflet

Newsletter of the Morgan Arboretum

Spring 2016

What to look for this spring:

Newts and salamanders

Frogs and woodland beauties

Birds and butterflies...

One of our four best seasons!

By Jim Fyles, Arboretum Director

By the time you read this message, spring will be in full bloom.

As I write, however, we are still wondering what has happened to winter, where all the snow was and, crucially, will there be enough to pour taffy on next weekend.

The new Arboretum phenology calendar on my wall tells me that, this week, the geese, robins and cedar waxwings arrive from the south (Merriam-Webster defines phenology as the branch of science that deals with relations between climate and biological phenomena like bird migration and plant flowering). And indeed they have. I was happy to see waxings hungrily inspecting the leftover crabapples in Blossom Corner during the week and I was surprised this weekend by the lines of geese overhead. Obviously I shouldn't have been; they're on the calendar!

The Arboretum draws us into nature. It connects us with the rhythm of life in the circle of seasons. In the busyness of day-to-day living, the Arboretum is, literally and figuratively, a breath of fresh air. And I am finding it wonderful to have on my wall a daily reminder of what is happening out there, even if I can't find time to get to the woods.

March 9: "Grey squirrel pups are born". Really?! Who knew?

One of the seasonal phenomena we see each year is the migration of frogs and salamanders from the Arboretum woods to the ponds where they reproduce and spend the summer. In the woods, they can find a nice thick blanket of leaf mould or a lovely rotting log that protects them from extreme cold during the winter. With a thick layer of snow, many spots in the woods stay close to freezing even on clear frosty nights when the temperature dips. But come spring, amphibians find their way through forest and field to congregate at the water. I find this phenomenon phenomenal! It is remarkable that salamanders and newts, with their tiny legs, can negotiate their way around trees and logs, and then through the matted grass across the Conservation Centre field. But the biggest obstacle of all is our entrance road. Crossing those few meters of open gravel, with no overhead cover from predators and a regular pummeling by tires, is truly a death-defying feat.

Many do not survive the crossing; in spring we often find lifeless remains on the road. But this year we will try to make life better for migrating

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TREE SALE

Join us
at the nursery
to discuss your
tree planting project

Sunday, April 24

9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Creatures you could encounter this spring

By Marina Kuneva, Student Volunteer

In line with our phenology theme for 2016, here is an overview of animals and plants to look for in the woods during the next few weeks. Because spring is when many species migrate and/or reproduce, they become more obvious to us as they go through important events in their life cycle. Can you locate them in their best outfit as they travel or reproduce?

Note that our mention of uses for plants is strictly for information. As you know, collection of plant material or any other natural element from the Arboretum is prohibited or requires prior authorization. Avoid picking, tasting and trampling plants and make sure not to stress or disturb animals as they are going through key phases of their life cycle. Remember that due to their permeable skin, amphibians are very sensitive to the traces of chemicals we often have on our hands. Bug spray is particularly toxic to them. Make sure to wash your hands carefully with a mild soap before and also after handling critters.

Eastern newt *Triton vert Notophthalmus viridescens*

In the early spring you might spot the eastern newt migrating towards a pond or shallow lake in the search of a suitable breeding site.

Description: The eastern newt, in the adult phase, is green with small red dots and has a yellow belly that is covered by black spots. The juvenile phase or so-called red elf is characterized by its bright orange-red colour.

Habitat and reproduction: The eastern newt goes through both terrestrial and aquatic life stages. Juveniles spend up to three years in the forest before they mature into adults and seek an aquatic environment to mate and

lay eggs. They can revert back to living in the forest at any time during their life cycle.

Diet: Although it predominantly eats insects and small aquatic invertebrates, it can occasionally feast on the eggs of some frogs or other salamanders.



The red elf or juvenile eastern newt (Flickr)

Predators: Its highly toxic skin (mainly for the red elf) prevents the eastern newt from being an easy meal for most animals.

To find them: The adults migrate from the forest to the pond on rainy days in April and May.



The adult eastern newt measures no more than 12 cm in length - John Williams (Flickr)

Spring peeper *Rainette crucifère Pseudacris crucifer*

The call of the peepers, spring is on its way is a sure sign of spring.

Description: Generally brown, dark green, or grey in colour, but predominantly brown-beige in our neck of the woods, the spring peepers are easily identified by a darker mark in the form of an "X" on their back. Their maximum length is 3.7cm and they have large toe pads which are used for climbing.

Habitat and reproduction: The spring peepers prefer liv-

ing on the forest floor, within proximity of wetlands or cattail ponds, which they require for their breeding rituals. When hibernating, they prefer to find cozy spots under dead logs or other forest debris. They will emerge from hibernating and gather in nearby ponds where the males will start to sing loudly in chorus. They use their vocal sac to create a short and distinct peeping sound that attracts females. Despite being our smallest frog species, they are also the loudest. As they are nocturnal, they tend to keep out of sight during the day.



The distinct cross pattern on its back and the toe pads

Diet: They feed mostly on small invertebrates such as mites, ants and gnats.

Predators: Some fish species and big aquatic insects can attack the larvae of the spring peeper,



The males' vocal sac expands and deflates like a balloon - Kory Roberts (Flickr)

while adults are mostly chased by shrews, garter snakes and some birds. However, its early reproduction period, cryptic colouration and small size protect it from most predators.

To find them: In the beginning of spring, typically not long after the ice melts on the wetlands around mid-March. Their chanting will continue well into the month of May.

Blue spotted salamander

Salamandre à points bleus *Ambystoma laterale*

Common in Quebec, this medium sized salamander can often be found in your backyard, resting under a rock.

Description: Its name comes from the blue-colored spots on the sides of its body, more readily visible in the juveniles. Up to 13cm long, it has large feet and a boxy head.

Habitat: This salamander likes forests and bogs that are in proximity to its breeding ponds. However, a big part of its territory is underground where it also hibernates.



The blue spotted salamander, a contemporary dinosaur-looking creature - Erik Williams (Flickr)

Diet: It feeds on a variety of invertebrates, such as worms, spiders and insects. The larvae aggressively compete for food in ponds and will attack small aquatic invertebrates.

Predators: When attacked, the blue spotted salamander releases a whitish secretion, which can be very toxic to predators. The introduction of various exotic fish species in ponds has been detrimental to the survival of the blue spotted salamander.

To find them: They start migrating towards breeding ponds in the beginning of April.

Bloodroot

Sanguinaire du Canada *Sanguinaria canadensis*

A sheer beauty, an hors d'oeuvre of the spring show.



A delicate short-lived bloom is revealed as the single leaf unfurls

Description: Its flower contains 8 to 16 petals and measures about 20 cm in height and no more than 4 cm across. Each individual has one very large leaf that is thick and olive green in color with a lobed contour that is typical of the poppy family. It has detectable ribs that hold red-colored latex.

Habitat: The bloodroot likes rocky and humid habitats and is found exposed in direct sunlight within the forest understory.

Use: Like other species in the poppy family, the bloodroot's latex has been used as an opium derivative in some instances. Indigenous people have also used it to paint their faces and clothing because of its vivid red color. Its

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Maciek Zarzycki
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In addition to the donors listed here, 41 individuals have contributed donations of less than \$50 for a total of \$977. Every bit counts!

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Road Improvement Fund:	\$1,606
For a total of:	\$30,594

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amphibians. The Arboretum is a hotspot for woodland frogs and salamanders. Even though we seldom see them, they are beautiful and we love to know that they are there. So, this year, and in years hence, we will be paying more attention to the migration. Often, huge numbers travel during the warm rainy weather of early spring. When we see large numbers, we will close the road and ask you to walk a little farther for the sake of the 'herps', as scientists call them. If you are diverted by such a herp crossing, take the time to walk the road and

look closely at the ground. You may see some of these tiny creatures making their spring trek, as they do each year.

Trekking in the Arboretum is not just for salamanders and it is one of the pleasures of an Arboretum visit. We are well provided with trails that can take us, if not to the wilderness, at least to scenic corners that are well away from our daily lives. Keeping the trails marked and in shape is a constant challenge and we are thankful to the many volunteers and Arboretum

staff who open the way for us. We are especially grateful for the volunteer Fall Cleanup crew who walked and trimmed all of the trails in preparation for ski season. We are also grateful for the volunteer ski patrollers who kept track of things and added a level of safety all winter. Of course, the skiing this winter left a lot to be desired with too much water in the early months and too much freezing rain and too little snowfall later. We are very thankful to Peter Kirby for his artistry with trail grooming

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medicinal use is now forbidden in Canada, due to its high toxicity which can result in fatal incidents.

Growth: Like the trilliums, it grows slowly and can take two to three years to bloom. Once established, the bloodroot can live for many decades, if not disturbed.

To find them: Bloodroot is the first spring ephemeral to bloom. If you are lucky, you can find it while it blooms for a few hours on a sunny day often during the third week of April.

Red trillium *Trille rouge Trillium erectum*

Undoubtedly, the red trillium with its graceful simplicity is a work of art.



You might know it under the name of ill-scented trillium because its stench is reminiscent of a wet dog or of rotting meat which attracts the flesh fly as a pollinator - BlueRidgeKitties (Flickr)

Description: This very photogenic flower has three large and pointy leaves. Its blossom has three dark red petals over three light sepals. The combination of three in all parts of the different trilliums is the origin of their name.

Habitat: The red trillium establishes itself in rich woodland ecosystems. Like all of

the spring ephemerals (all trilliums, bloodroot and many others), it grows its flowers and leaves before the trees leaf out in the forest, taking advantage of two weeks of full sunlight on the forest floor in order to complete its life cycle.

Use: Trilliums fascinate many flower lovers around the world, but harvest threatens their survival. Indigenous people have used trilliums extensively for medicinal practices because of their antiseptic and antiallergenic properties.

To find them: In early May, in the maple grooves mixed in amongst the white trillium carpet. The red trillium flower buds open a few days before those of the white trillium.

White trillium *Trille blanc Trillium grandiflorum*

White trillium is one of the most familiar and beloved woodland spring ephemerals. Although it may seem abundant, do not pick it because of its vulnerable status.



White trillium, also called large-flowered trillium, is a pure delight by Debbie Wright

Description: Its large petals make it distinctive from all other trilliums which have narrow petals. Unlike the red trillium, the white trillium is odorless.

Habitat: The white trillium also grows in rich maple woodlands that include hickory or linden. They form large colonies that carpet the forest understory with dashes of some of the other spring ephemerals.

Use: More specifically, the white trillium's medicinal properties have been associated with birth related treatments and menstrual regulation.

Growth: Because they complete their annual life cycle within a month, their rhizome is slow to grow and it takes up to 10 years for the red or white trillium to mature and bloom.

To find them: The most impressive colony in the Arboretum is found along the Yellow trail near the Scout Cabin.

Tree Swallow *Hirondelle bicolor Tachycineta bicolor*

Watch them as they chase after flying insects with swift aerial twists and turns, their blue-green iridescent backs flashing in the sunlight.

Description: Both males and females have blueish black upper parts and clean white breasts -hence the name hirondelle bicolor in French. Their long, pointed wings can extend to approximately 35 cm and they measure about 14 cm in length which includes their shallowly forked tail. **Habitat:** Tree swallows live and breed in open habitats such as fields and wetlands.

Nesting: It builds a nest of stems, grasses and roots, assembled with fine grasses and feathers, in nest boxes, or natural cavities such as old woodpeckers' holes. They are also known to use empty bluebird nest boxes. The female

usually incubates 4 to 7 white eggs for 14-15 days.

Diet: Tree swallows like to pluck insects, such as mosquitoes from the air and can find large numbers in a few minutes during the summer. In winter, they feed on berries and other plant parts.



Tree swallow leaving its nest box in search of a meal by André Rouleau

To find them: Every summer there are tree swallows residing in the Arboretum nest boxes and feeding on the hoards of mosquitoes from its wetlands. Look for them on the powerlines by the Conservation Centre.

Eastern Comma *Polygone virgule Polygonia comma*

One of the first butterflies to come out of its winter cache, it can be seen on the wing on a warm day in April.

Description: The eastern commas have wings which have a very particular pattern of tawny orange, covered with dark spots and with jagged brown edges. Their wingspan is between



Eastern comma feeding on blackberry - PROJon Law Follow (Flickr)

5 and 6 cm. Males are slightly smaller and a brighter orange than females. On their underside they show a brownish pattern which resembles fallen leaves and includes a white mark in the form of a comma on the hindwing, which is the distinctive feature of the species.

Habitat and diet: Commas look for moist woodland, preferring the sunnier parts of the forest and feed on rot-

See our [program of nature talks and walks](#). Here's a sample:

Frog Songs: The Symphony of Spring
Saturday, May 14, 2016, 7:30-9:30 pm

This Just In: Spring Bird Migration Walk
Saturday, May 21, 2016, 8:00-12:00 am

ting fruit and sap flows. However, they can be observed in a variety of environments since they are very mobile.

Ecology: There are two generations per year: overwintering adults that are seen flying and laying eggs at the end of April, and then the summer form which emerges and flies from May to September. The eggs of the latter develop into the winter form which appears in September or October and soon seeks shelter in which to spend the winter. The two forms can be distinguished by the pattern of their upper hindwing, the winter form is orange with black dots whereas the summer form's is mostly all black.

To find them: One of the first insects to fly on warm days in late April, and found in mud puddles along the Orange trail and on the sunny edges of woodland trails.

White admiral *Amiral Limenitis Arthemis arthemis*

The admirals can show a great deal of variability in their wing patterns. Try to find as many different ones as possible.

Description: There are several forms or subspecies of this butterfly. Two of the subspecies have strikingly different appearances. One lives in the north and the other is found in the south. Where their ranges overlap, they hybridize. This creates a great deal of variability in the color patterns within the species. The arthemis subspecies is the northern form and the only one found here. Their upper-side is black with a broad white band across both wings. Underneath, their color is brown-amber, with the same white band. The patterns of blue and red dots vary from one individual to the next. Females and males look alike although females are slightly larger.

Habitat: White admirals prefer deciduous woodland, roads and clearings. They like to sun themselves on leaves or on gravel



A white admiral sun-bathing - Ian Redman (Flickr)

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equipment that managed to squeeze great skiing from even the most miserable conditions. I have to admit that on a few days I forsook the skiing

for a peaceful walk around the Orange Trail; I was appreciative of the good walking surface cleared by Scott and his crew.

But the calendar tells us to expect more signs of spring. And for those of you lucky enough to have joined Chris for his late winter Owl Prowl, the hooting owls were saying the same thing. Spring is one of the four best seasons we have in the Arboretum. I hope you will enjoy it and that I will see you on the trail. 🌸

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roads, where they periodically open and close their wings.

Life stages: The chrysalis is white with greyish-brown areas and cleverly resembles a bird dropping when it sits on a leaf. In Quebec, there is only one generation of butterflies each year which emerges in the late spring.

Diet: The preferred host plants for the admiral caterpillars include birches, willows, poplars and cherry trees. Butterflies are rarely seen on flowers as they prefer feeding on sap, aphid honeydew, rotting fruit and dung.

To find them: The Centre Road (orange trail) is an ideal location for them. 🌸

Morgan Arboretum Association

Established in 1952



Dedicated to forest conservation and environmental education

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21,111 Lakeshore Road P.O. Box 186
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Tel.: 514-398-7811
Fax: 514-398-7959
Email: morgan.arboretum@mcgill.ca
Web Site: www.morganarboretum.org

THE LEAFLET

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Anne-Marie Pilon

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Female katsura tree in Blossom Corner



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