

Making Ripples

Spring is Here!

by Amanda Bancroft

March 20th is the official first day of spring, but looking around us, the plants and animals didn't wait. To them, life is a wheel ever turning towards the next moment, bringing continuous change. Each dormant day of winter marks a task off nature's to-do list for spring.

Already, tiger salamanders have courted, and our local foxes, coyotes, mink, bobcats, raccoons, and flying squirrels have mated or had their chance. Squirrels will be giving birth to new spring litters throughout March. Woodchucks (or groundhogs) will be mating this month. Screech owls and Barred owls are nesting, and if you visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology web cams at Cams.AllAboutBirds.org, you'll see Great Horned Owls using a former Bald eagle's nest and raising two fuzz balls already fluffy with downy plumage. Eastern cottontail rabbits will bear their first litters in the coming days, so beware not to give them too-close a haircut with your lawnmower once the spring grass fills in.

Baby river otters are in dens right now near lakes or streams. Helpless opossum babies are in their mother's pouch, developing a mouth full of more teeth than any North American mammal (50 of them). Badgers are giving birth to feisty little ones, and even the bats are leaving their hibernation caves. Mourning doves are engaging in their courtship flights that, if you're lucky, you might get to glimpse. Canada geese are migrating north through April, and it's time to put out those bluebird nest boxes to welcome the birds of happiness. Wild turkeys will be gobbling until early May, and this is a real treat to hear.

Spring peepers are reaching the peak of their deafening peeping. In fact, it seems that the whole world is filling up with squeaks and peeps (not the marshmallow kind). Some of the sounds may be unwelcome, such as the Pileated woodpeckers drumming against the side of your house to attract a mate – but just think, of all the houses they could have chosen, yours looked the sexiest (and made the loudest sound, which is what they're after).

Yes, the plants are in on it too – the red cedars are releasing pollen, the pussy willows are creating fuzzy blooms like little kitten paws without the claws, and redbuds are about to begin blooming! Zebra swallowtail butterflies will soon be swooping down on the wildflowers, many of which are already blooming. Pawpaws, the Zebra swallowtail's tree, will begin blooming in April. Ruby-throated hummingbirds will be arriving soon, so dust off your nectar feeders (or craft a new one with the kids!). Robins, the popular symbol of spring alongside daffodils, will be building their nests and enjoying those plump worms after a rainfall.

Our backyards are part of a giant living room for nature. We don't want to be like children leaving a big mess for mom to clean up later. Make it a cozy room and visit our archives at RipplesBlog.org/MakingRipples to get ideas for backyard habitat, recycling, water catchment, vermiculture and more.

Ripples is an emerging online educational center inspired by a holistic approach to making a difference. Follow our journey to live sustainably and make ripples with our lifestyle at: www.RipplesBlog.org.