

Spring Arrives Early: Get Outside at the Lawrence Nature Center!

Whether you believe in global climate change or cyclic weather patterns, the winter of 2011-2012 was the, "Winter that Wasn't." I led a full moon hike on January 7th and anticipated a handful of people on a frigid January night. Instead the temperature rose to 62 degrees during the day and nearly one hundred and fifty people decided to take the moonlit hike that evening in Drexel Woods. Who would have thought that this could have happened?

A month later, the groundhogs in New Jersey must have experienced cloudy conditions on their celebrated day, as Spring *had* arrived early. Oddly, on Groundhogs Day I was taking an evening hike with cub scouts from Troop 28 and we found a tiny Spring Peeper (that little frog with a huge voice). It was hiding under one of our reptile and amphibian research boards. That is right, a frog out on February 2nd, 2012, another historically mild day during the "Winter that Wasn't." But back to speaking of our furry friends, I saw two woodchucks (a.k.a. groundhogs) barreling down the meadow path as I sat in the nature center chatting with the vice-president of the *Friends of the Lawrence Nature Center*, Sue Herrmann on March 24, 2012. On the other side of the meadow were three white-tailed deer, but these are not uncommon at our preserve; they are year-round residents. What does that mean to us two-legged creatures? Well it is a good reason to get out and enjoy the warmer temperatures, the increasing daylight each day and nature's wonders.

What else can be seen at this time of the year at the Lawrence Nature Center and Drexel Woods? I noticed that the chipping sparrows have started calling. Listen for them calling from the coniferous trees along the driveway. You'll also hear our more common northern cardinals and tufted titmice. If you are walking along the Blue Trail near the Shabakunk Creek on a warm day or evening, you are sure to hear a chorus of spring peepers. On the first day of spring, we saw bats flying overhead, foraging on early flying insects. My own bat box on my home was occupied by a single bat on that evening, and two days later we had four.

Don't forget to look down when walking in Drexel Woods because the native ephemeral wildflowers have emerged and are blooming! You'll see the beautiful pinkish-white Spring beauty, the gorgeous yellow trout lily and the early stages of the May apple. If you want to see what happens when garden variety plants escape from our yards, take a hike on our newly created Red Trail. Eagle Scout candidate Max Reitz recently built a new trail that goes through an interesting spring palate of non-native wildflowers. At the end of March you will see the yellow blooms of the particularly aggressive lesser celandine, the purple flowers of the hardy myrtle or periwinkle, the white flowers of pachysandra and possibly a few remnant early bloomers called snowbells.

The shrubs and trees are also flowering. The understory in Drexel Woods is alive with spicebush's yellow bloom as well as the bright red flowers of red maple and a couple of white crabapple. Once back at the driveway you may be able to catch the last of the giant white and pink petals from the Magnolia tree. These are just a few of nature's arrivals in the early Spring. Stay tuned as we hope to keep our web site current with what is out and about around the Lawrence Nature Center. If you happen to Get Outside at the LNC, keep us posted on your own observations by writing to us at lawrencenaturecenter@gmail.com.



Three Native wildflowers: the thin leaved white-flowering Spring Beauty, the broader leaved Trout Lily (no flowers) and two palmate-leaved Mayapples.



Non-native Pachysandra (left) and Periwinkle.



Lesser celandine is a particularly invasive plant along our waterways and forms dense ground cover prohibiting germination of other plants.



Spicebush is the common understory shrub of Drexel Woods and is seen here in bloom along the new Red Trail.



This is a Mayapple in bloom taken in April or May.