

Celebrate Signs of Spring

As winter loosens its grip on nature, spring rushes in with exciting changes. It is a wonderful time to go outside and take in the new sounds, sights and smells that spring brings. Make it a family experience and head out into nature. A Spring Scavenger Hunt, see below, is a great way to start.

After the quiet of winter, there is suddenly lots to hear in nature. The winter birds are calling for mates and claiming territories. Great Horned Owls already have owlets by mid-March, and families can be noisy. Returning migratory birds are adding their songs to mix. With toads trilling, woodpeckers knocking, spring peepers peeping, and more, it's a feast for your ears out there.

There is lots to see as life stirs and colour returns to the landscape. Celebrate as you spot various 'first of the season' events. For example,

- * the first flower - the cheerful yellow Coltsfoot which blooms first and then sprouting leaves after the risk of freezing has passed,
- * the first butterfly - the Mourning Cloak which winters over as an adult,
- * the first sighting of your favorite summer bird.
- * the first critter out of hibernation—a chipmunk, ground hog, perhaps a skunk

Before the leaves emerge, it is easy to see woodpecker holes in trees. While feeding, each type of woodpecker makes a different hole; from large, rectangular holes of the big Pileated Woodpecker to the line of small, shallow holes of the Yellow-bellied sapsucker. Sap oozing from some of the holes and sapsicles, which form where sap drips from broken tree branches and freezes, is welcome food for many critters in the spring.



Cottonwood buds

On a spring hike you can't help but see the buds on the trees. Big and fat, they are ready to open into leaves. The cottonwood trees coat their buds with a sticky resin to protect them in the winter. When the buds open, the resin releases a wonderful smell. Something to sniff on your spring walks. (In the fall, bees use the resin to seal their hives to keep out intruders)

Feel spring when you touch colourful lichens or green mosses. Explore the rubbery leaves of some spring plants, like the Trout Lily. These leaves keep moisture in over the winter. Explore how the sun's heat warms the earth. Feel the warmth, hear the melting ice and snow, look for evidence of radiant heat all around you.

Spring is the season of renewal. Take a fresh, new look into nature.



Coltsfoot



Sapsicle



Rings made by radiant heat

Caution—stay away from bodies of water in the spring. Banks and shorelines are not stable and often slippery. Ice is thinning and treacherous. Meltwater makes streams and rivers fast flowing and dangerous.

Stay away, stay safe!

Spring Scavenger Hunt

I saw

- red buds on a tree
- 2 differently-shaped holes made by woodpeckers
- a bird I have not seen all winter
- animal tracks in mud
- new green shoots beginning to grow
- a Mourning Cloak butterfly (it wintered over as an adult)
- a group of insects
- decomposing leaves
- a bird singing from the very top of a something
- Reindeer lichen
- a flower



I heard

- the splish-splash of boots stepping in a puddle
- a woodpecker knocking
- three different types of birds calling
- the wind in the trees
- an amphibian calling, spring peepers peeping, a toad trilling



I felt

- the warmth of the sun on my skin
- soft green moss on a rock
- a rubbery leaf (Trout Lily)
- the sticky resin on a poplar tree bud or tree sap
- crispy flakes of lichen on a tree
- inside a hole made by a woodpecker



I smelled

- poplar/cottonwood tree buds
- Maple sap boiling into syrup
- fresh spring air
- cedar or evergreen needles



I tasted

- Yellow Birch twigs— minty yum!
- sweetwater—maple sap
- Maple syrup, taffy or sugar
- a rain drop

