



Nature Guides

Mating on their Minds: Frogs and Salamanders

Early April 2011

Featured event: ["Froggy went a courtin..."](#)

Just as the September cicadas were a harbinger of fall, nothing says spring to me more than the calling of frogs in their eternal mating dance. A few weeks ago, some were just the frogsicles of Late November, but now they have thawed, and have mating on their little minds.

Only the males will call, attracting females and in some cases establishing territory. This will begin when the air temperatures at night warm up to at least 8°C. The first few may have begun calling at the end of March in the deep southwest, but April is their month to shine in south-central Ontario. Calls are most common from dusk to full dark, but some species will call during the day. Look for mild, damp, still conditions after or even during a light rain.

Fertilization is external. The male [clasps the female](#) from behind and mixes sperm with the eggs as they come out of her body. The fertilized eggs of early spring frogs sink well below the surface, where they are insulated from late, hard frosts and ice film.

Below is information on a few of Ontario's frogs, in rough order of April appearance. When looking, remember that some of these frogs are no bigger than a bumblebee. Look for their [throat sacs](#) as they [call](#). For more information on these and other frogs and toads, and to hear their calls, [visit the FrogWatch site](#).

Top R4R Picks

Resources for extending the learning

[Monarch Butterfly: Royal Mail. Activities for Grades 5-8](#)
Elementary, Middle

[Fall Monarch Migration](#)
Elementary, Middle

[Forests Alive](#)
Elementary, Middle

[Big Water Ideas 2](#)
Elementary

Frog	Location	Call	Look for
Western Chorus Frog	Almost any fishless pond; prefer grassy/ shrubby swamp areas.	Rising trill; sounds like a fingernail drawn across a comb.	On surface in floating plant debris; very hard to see.
Spring Peeper	Wide range of ponds, vernal pools ; most common near brushy thickets	Loud, high-pitched peep, rising at end.	On vegetation just above water.
Wood Frog	Wooded wetlands and swamps; vernal pools.	Short chuckle, like ducks quacking.	On surface in floating plant debris.
American Toad	Shallow ponds, streams & roadside ditches	Long, monotone trill; different frogs have different notes.	In aquatic and emergent vegetation


Leopard Frog	Relatively permanent, fishless ponds	Rattling snore and guttural chucks; like wet hands rubbing a balloon.	Surface, mostly submerged.
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Again, consider joining [FrogWatch](#), and add to our information about these amphibians.

Other Happenings:

Salamanders also have sex on their minds, and often travel some distance to mate in [vernal pools](#). The most commonly observed species are the [Yellow-spotted Salamander](#), the [Blue-spotted Salamander](#) and the [Eastern Newt](#). By using these temporary ponds, salamanders avoid predation of their eggs and young by fish and turtles, but must breed early enough for their larvae to transform before the ponds dry up. Mild, rainy nights above 8°C are a good time to look for them along [roads](#) passing through swampy woodlands. Take care that you don't run over any. In some cases, [underpasses](#) have been built so the salamanders can avoid traffic.

Any early, fairly large mosquitoes that you see are from the Genus [Culex](#), and have overwintered as adults.

Monarch Butterflies  have been pouring out of their Mexican sanctuaries since about mid-March, and have now reached close to the north Texas border and into Louisiana. These are the same butterflies that left the North last fall! But they won't make it back up here. But expect fewer Monarch's this year – a low number of overwintering butterflies has been decimated by strong, mid-winter rainstorms accompanied by hail, wind and landslides linked to illegal logging. Stay tuned to [Journey North](#) for weekly updates, and sign up to report your first Monarchs.

[Woolly bear caterpillars](#) are again briefly seen, shaking off the effects of winter hibernation before pupating and emerging as [Isabella Moths](#).

Near birch or aspen woods, look for [The Infant](#), a day-flying moth that appears orange at a distance.

Those other bears, the Black ones, are coming out of their winter dens – first males, then females with yearlings or no cubs, and finally females with cubs. Denning periods are a good time to measure and tag both adults and cubs – check out [Rick Mercer's experience](#) doing winter bear research with the MNR. Spring bears are almost entirely vegetarian, starting on Balsam Poplar buds and going on to new aspen leaves, grass and dandelions. Bears won't gain back all the weight lost during the winter until summer berry season.

Look for [River Otters](#) active on the remaining ice margins beside open water. They will bring prey up onto the ice to eat, and are highly visible against the snow and ice.

[Groundhogs](#) (Woodchucks) finally emerge from hibernation, if they haven't already. How did their Groundhog Day prediction (Early February) turn out in your region?

[Ruffed Grouse](#) males will be [drumming](#) throughout April, trying, of course, to interest a female. The [sound](#) is at a fairly low register, and may sound like someone trying to start a balky motorbike (scroll down).

Waterfowl numbers will probably be at their peak early in the month, as those returning for the summer rub wings with those just passing through. Look for [Common Loon](#), [Horned Grebe](#), [Red-necked Grebe](#), [Sandhill Cranes](#) and [Double-crested Cormorants](#) coming in early. [Ospreys](#) should also be arriving, and beginning to nest.

April is the best month to hear [Barred Owls](#) (includes call).

The annual "[State of the Birds](#)" report for the United States has just been released, focusing on climate change. The report shows that climate change will have an increasingly disruptive effect on bird species in all habitats, with oceanic and Hawaiian birds in greatest peril.

"April showers bring May flowers." April is generally thought of as a rainy month, but in the Kawarthas, May and June are on average much rainier. Find out how rainy April generally is in your region, and see if it holds true this year.

Boötes is now in the eastern evening sky, and Orion is low to the west, reclining as if tired of his winter-long domination, and finally taking his leave with the rest of the cold weather.



Earth Hour: 8:30 PM on
March 26th 2011

Earth Day- April 22nd
2011

World Water Day: March
22nd, 2011