




Nature Guides

It's a Competitive Market: Finding Food, Home and a Mate

Late April

Featured species: those @#%\$\$\$#@#\$&^!! geese again!

Large, high-altitude flocks of [Canada Geese](#) are passing through over the next half-month. These are mostly the Northern subspecies of the Canada Goose, *Branta Canadensis interior* (see Late October for a discussion of Goose subspecies).

Unlike our Giant subspecies, these birds have declined in population, only recently stabilizing at a fairly low level (roughly 100,000 birds). This has been mirrored by a rise in the population of Giants, and may be caused in part by increasing numbers of Giants flying up to James Bay to moult, and competing with the nesting Northerns and their goslings for scarce food. This has been exacerbated by the [destruction of salt marsh habitat](#) by large numbers of [Snow Geese](#),  on the increase because of heightened food production in the U.S.

Midwest. Everything *is* connected.

Other happenings:

- [Bank](#) and [Cliff](#) Swallows may have joined the Tree Swallows in competition for all those midges.
- Other late April arrivals include [Broad-winged hawks](#), [Chimney Swifts](#) and [Eastern Towhee](#), while many of the diving ducks are departing for northern breeding grounds (Common Goldeneye, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Common Merganser).
- Both [Woodcock](#) and Wilson's [Snipe](#) males are putting on their dramatic flight displays. Here's a good [video](#) of Woodcock on the ground, and one of the [Snipe flight](#) without the [winnowing](#) sound created by the tail feathers (scroll down). Woodcock sounds are [here](#) (scroll down).
- Any dragonflies that you are likely to see will be migrant [Common Green Darners](#), pushed north on warm southern winds.
- Turtles and [Eastern Garter Snakes](#) emerge from their winter sleep. Male snakes are first on the scene, waiting for receptive females. When one appears, males fall on her in a [writhing mass](#), but only one lucky male gets to impregnate her, leaving behind a plug of gelatine in her vent.
- In a normal year, [Leopard](#) and [Pickerel](#) (a bit later) Frogs join the amphibian chorus in nearby ponds and wetlands. They may be a bit delayed this year, but keep an ear out.
- [Northern Pike](#) move into weedy shallows and flooded marshes to spawn (at 4 - 11°C), followed soon after by [Muskellunge](#) (9 - 15°C). This cold spring may delay things a bit, but both fish are easily visible by foot or canoe.
- Soon we may actually get some of those warm, spring days. When the thermometer breaks 15°C, keep an eye out for butterflies that have overwintered as adults, including the [Mourning Cloak](#), [Eastern Comma](#) and [Compton](#)

Top R4R Picks

Resources for extending the learning

[Saving the Monarch](#)

Elementary

[Fall Monarch Migration](#)


Elementary, Middle

[Evolution, Diversity and the Sustainability of Life](#)

Secondary

See Lesson 1 - A Species and Ecosystem in Peril

Tortoiseshell. With very few flowers available, these insects are attracted by tree sap, which is often provided by fresh sapsucker holes.

- Other flowers are joining Coltsfoot and Marsh Marigold in bloom, including Bloodroot, Spring Beauty, hepaticas, Blue Cohosh (a bit later) and Dutchman's Breeches (also a bit later). Look for violets in gardens and perhaps an early Common Dandelion or two.
- Just as they were the last to drop their leaves, city-bred, non-native trees are often the first to leaf out. Check the buds on Norway Maples and other introduced species. Among natives, Red-berried Elder is among the first to leaf.
- Farmers are out in the fields, and if conditions are dry enough, will begin to plant hard corn, oats and spring wheat by the end of the month.
- The Lyrids meteor shower can be seen peaking to the northeast between April 20th and 22nd. It has been observed for over 2600 years, but is generally weak (10–20 meteors/hour), with occasional years of higher frequencies. The locus, or radiant for this shower is between the star Vega and the constellation Hercules, and points back toward the constellation Lyra. This shower is caused by the debris trail of the comet Thatcher, and is best viewed after midnight and before sunrise. The comet was named in 1861, but won't return until 2276.
- Monarch Butterflies  are now in Oklahoma and Arkansas. These are still the butterflies that overwintered in Mexico, and are now laying eggs on fresh Milkweed plants. It's the next generation that will push its way north to us. View an animation of the spring migration here. Get ready to report your sightings later this spring.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have reached Michigan and Ohio, and are due into Ontario generally in early to mid-May (but occasionally in late April). So keep your eyes peeled and your feeders ready, especially in the southwest part of the province. View their migration to date here, and be ready to track them into Ontario.