

## NATURE NOTES – APRIL 2021

Although the poet Browning exclaims “Oh to be in England, now that April’s there!”, being around our lakes in April is an equally wonderful experience. Despite being in “lockdown” we are experiencing a spring that is anything but. Some unseasonably warm weather in late March saw a whole flurry of activity in the natural world not to mention the more extreme outdoor enthusiasts amongst us launching a kayak on the early date of April 4. Wood Frogs and Spring Peepers were already in good voice by the end March and by the first week of April wildflowers such as



**Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** early in April and soon after the maniacal laughter of the ground-feeding **Northern Flicker** was heard echoing through the woods. The sparrows have been well-represented this month with the Song Sparrow seen during the winter at the beaver pond off Rainbow Lane being joined by many others, while Chipping Sparrow, **Field Sparrow**, Swamp Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow all arrived as the month progressed. That lovely sparrow relation, the Eastern Towhee, has just returned also. Listen for

Hepatica started blooming in the woods, now joined by White and Red Trilliums in profusion. The first garter snakes wriggled out of hibernation, turtles started sunning themselves on available logs and early migrants such as American Woodcock, Eastern Phoebe and Red-shouldered Hawks started prospecting for nest sites. Loons returned to the lakes while the first of the wood warblers, Pine Warbler, arrived on the early date of April 14, with Yellow-rumped and Palm Warblers appearing less than two weeks later. Our resident woodpecker species were joined by splendid



him exhorting you to “Drink your Tea” in the more open areas of scrubby growth and low junipers. On the finch side I think we were all a little relieved to see the hordes of Common Redpolls, which had eaten their way through our stocks of Nyjer seed for a good part of the winter, finally depart for northern climes. They have since been replaced by small numbers of glorious Purple Finches, the males looking as though they have been dipped in raspberry jam. Joined by the American Goldfinches resplendent in their bright yellow spring colours, these finches provide a veritable visual feast.

Quite exciting has been the presence of a Virginia Rail in one of the marshy areas off the 36. First detected on April 14, today it was giving its “kiddick” call quite persistently, interspersed with the occasional grunt display. Hopefully it is planning nesting in the area and attracts Mrs. Rail shortly. Closely related to the rail, believe it or not, is the Sandhill Crane. Several have been seen and heard overhead this month, so cast an eye skywards if you hear something that sounds like a loud discordant turkey flying over. Apparently these bugling calls can be heard up to 2.5 miles away! And we thought Canada Geese were noisy.



Not to be outdone the mammals of the area have been out and about. Yesterday saw the first appearance of a Groundhog, which I was happy to see off in the direction of our neighbours. Vegetable growers beware! Earlier in the month the first porcupine was spotted along a local trail and of course Beavers, Muskrats and River Otters have been busy in our waterways. Check out posts on our Facebook page from folk who have game cams set up and frequently capture some of our local critters in action.

Now that there are quite a few people up at the lakes, I thought it might be rather fun to issue my fellow bird enthusiasts a challenge. Having a bit of an “in” with the local editor of eBird, a global bird record database, I have had Rainbow and Little Silver Lake declared an official eBird hotspot. At present only my observations appear there, and these tend to be heavily skewed towards Rainbow Lake. It would be awesome if other folk around the lakes could submit what they see at their feeders, while out walking, looking out over the lake or just while working in the yard. It’s really easy to sign up. You just go to the eBird website <https://ebird.org/home>, pick a user name and password and hey presto, you are registered. You can submit your sightings for anywhere in the world, but the challenge for now is to enter birds seen at our very own hotspot - Rainbow Lake and Little Silver Lake: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L4801528>. You can follow this link and click “Submit data” or go to Explore and search for the hotspot by name. If you don’t want to actually count individuals you can just put an X to signify a sighting. I am really looking forward to seeing your contributions to our lake data. Soon we will be joined by many more species as spring migration peaks in May.



As I am writing this a Pileated Woodpecker just flew in and landed on the tree outside my office window. It reminds me of the first time we viewed this little piece of paradise, almost 6 years ago to the day. As we looked around the property a Pileated flew in very close and we took it as a sign that we should move here. We have certainly not regretted that decision it for a moment!

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With thanks to Stewart Bentley for the illustrations