



Ferrum Nature Society

Dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of our natural world

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Nature's Events

Spring is springing this month! Look for frog and toad choruses starting to swell during the month. Snakes and turtles will also become active. Our southern and neotropical migrant songbirds will be returning. Have your hummingbird feeders armed and ready by the middle of this month.

The spring bloom is on—look for Virginia bluebells, trilliums and other spring wildflowers, as well as the leafout of many forest trees and shrubs.

Sky calendar:

Full moon - April 13th—
Known as the Milk Moon.

Daylight Savings Time!! -
Don't forget to turn your clocks *forward* one hour on April 2nd - officially at 2am, but before you go to bed on Saturday night will work too!

Planets - Early this month look for Mars shining just to the lower right of the moon. Saturn can be found to the left or below the moon. At mid-month you can see Jupiter to the left of the moon. Late in the month, near dawn, you can see Venus close to the waning moon.

Why Invite a Toad to Dinner? - Nancy Overton



Why would anyone want to do such a thing? They're creepy crawly little critters! And have you seen them eat? Such atrocious table manners!

Toads may not be the best guests to have around the dinner table, but they are great to have in your yard. The American toad (*Bufo americanus*) is the most common toad found in Northern Virginia, and possesses a voracious appetite. One of nature's most efficient bug-eaters, the American toad's diet consists of a variety of insects including ants, beetles, crickets, centipedes, flies, and mosquitoes. Slugs and worms are also a preferred delicacy.

Unlike frogs, toads have rough leathery skin covered by numerous bumps. These are often referred to as warts. Contrary to what you may have heard on the playground as a kid, people cannot get warts from handling a toad. Toads vary in color. They can be black, brown, tan, green, gray, or an orange-red, and are often a combination of these colors. Toads can also change their color or shade to match their surroundings, though

this ability is limited. You will never see a pink toad!

Toads are natural introverts. They spend most of the day hiding amongst leaf litter, under plants such as ferns, Virginia creeper, honeysuckle and hostas, or under ground if the temperature is too hot or too cold. Toads are active at night, coming out of their hiding places in search of food. In spring, male toads can be heard "calling" to attract females. The American toad's call is a gentle, pleasant sounding trill that lasts between 10 and 30 seconds.

So how can you attract toads to your yard?

Like all creatures, toads have four fundamental needs: food, water, shelter, and a place to raise young. **Food** for toads means insects. Insects are attracted to plants and plant debris. If you include a variety of trees, shrubs, flowers, and groundcover plants in your yard, you will attract a variety of insects and provide a source of **shelter** for your toad guests. Adding an ornamental pond to your yard provides a source of **water** and a place for **young to develop**. Toads begin life in water and "morph" into land dwellers. Having a pond, however, is not essential. Unlike frogs, toads are mainly terrestrial, and don't need to be close to or in water all the time. For instance, even if a neighbor a few doors down has a pond, toads may still spend most of their time in your yard if food and shelter conditions are more favorable.

Please don't poison your guests!

Homeowners in the United States use up to ten times more pesticides per acre on lawns than farmers use on crops! Chemical pesticides are known to be lethal or cause deformities in amphibian young (tadpoles), and can be lethal to adult amphibians as well. If you want to have toads, don't use pesticides. The toads that inhabit your yard will do their best to naturally rid you of your garden pests.

Toads are natural insect hunters and an indicator of a healthy environment.
Invite a toad to dinner today!

Living in Harmony with Nature

- Angie Spence

We live in a country where there are no policies, procedures, or regulations incorporated within the laws for a harmonious mixture of humans and wildlife. There is the one simple implication that “humans are on top, ruling and animals are on the bottom, succumbing to humans” is the major decree. Things at the bottom tend to be the foundation for the things at the top. Without twisting words, in order for humans to remain on top, we must take care of the bottom. We are beholden to the creatures, regardless of their sizes or contributions, for allowing us to be “on top.” Sorting out the theories and approaches are difficult. What we believe in today, can change overnight, sending us in a new direction and propelling the animals and humans into a tail spin. Conserving nature means protecting ourselves also. For without the animals, plants, and other living organisms, we would not be able to exist.

Learning all that you can about conservation is the first step to harmonious co-existence. By getting involved in conservation plans, especially in particular area of interest to individuals, is the next step. If guidelines and laws are found to not be beneficial to either part involved, contact the people of political associations assisting conservation issues and efforts. Or better yet, become an advocate for the supporting cause or causes. By not getting involved, the ideas, thoughts, and beliefs of individuals will not be considered. They simply become ideas, thoughts, and beliefs of the “dead files.”

Franklin County Bird Day—Sunday, April 23

Join our bird experts, Clyde Kessler and Raymond Callahan, for a bird count within the borders of Franklin County. The goal is count as many individual birds and bird species as possible within a 24-hour period from midnight on April 23 to midnight on April 24. We will have a campus bird hike starting at 8 AM. Meet outside the greenhouse at Garber Hall. At 12 PM, all are invited to a barbeque at Nell and Todd's house. Call 365-7400 if you need directions. We will mist net birds (but we will not barbeque them!). Come and get a close-up few of a variety of songbirds.



JD and gray catbird

Mud daubers (*Sceliphron caementarium*)

-Frankie Smith

The metallic blue-black mud dauber is a relatively common insect. Most people have seen their earthen tubes on the sides of the buildings or under eaves. They have emerged in the last week or so (mid March) and are starting to get active. Mud daubers rarely sting and control is seldom needed.

Mud daubers may become a nuisance when they construct their mud nests, especially on porches, decks, sheds, eaves, attics, ceilings, walls and under roof overhangs around homes and other structures where people live, work and play.

Female black and yellow mud daubers paralyze spiders, pack them into the mud tubes with their head until full, lay one egg and seal the cell. The young that hatch later this summer will feed on the spiders, pupate, and emerge as adults this time next year. Left over spider parts are visible above the cocoon.

When painting buildings, it is often necessary to remove the finger-like mud tubes from places which need to be painted. Nests can be removed with a putty knife and adults killed with a fly swatter, if necessary. Usually it is not necessary to control mud daubers unless their presence is a nuisance. They are beneficial to humans by sometimes killing dangerous spiders such as the black widow.

Chemical control should be considered only as a last resort since these wasps are not aggressive and rarely sting unless handled. Adults can be killed with an aerosol spray containing synergized pyrethrins or resmethrin. After use of insecticides, scrape away the nest with putty knife or other tool, and dispose of it to prevent emergence of developing young and possible infestations of dermestid beetles in the old nest. When using insecticides, follow label directions and safety precautions.

