



The Ferrum Nature Society Bulletin

Dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of our natural world

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Nature's events:

Spring arrives !

All kinds of life begins to stir this month. The voices of spring peepers and American toads will begin to fill the air later this month. Bird song is already on the rise. Early Spring wildflowers, such as blood root, toothwort, and spring beauty emerge from the leaf litter in the forests.

Sky calendar:

Full moon - March 3.

The Egg moon. A total eclipse of the moon will occur in the early evening lasting from 4:45 - 6 pm.

Planets - Look for Saturn near the moon in the evening early and late in the month. Venus is also visible near the moon in the evening later this month. Jupiter, Mars and Mercury can be seen before dawn in the southern sky later this month.

Vernal Equinox -

Spring officially arrives on March 20 at 8:07 pm.

Remember that **Day-light Savings Time** is early this year! Set clocks ahead at 2 am on March 11 (or at least before you go to bed that night!)

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Ducks on the pond: water birds to spot on campus ponds

Tiffany Garnett

There are several species of aquatic birds that reside on Adams Lake and Chapman Pond and several that be seen stopping over during spring and fall migration. During the month of March, there may be many opportunities to see some unusual bird species during the spring migration.

The three most common bird species on campus ponds are the Mallard Duck, the Canada Goose, and Bufflehead Duck. In North America, they winter from the Maritime provinces of Canada down to Mexico. The Mallard is the only one of these species that breeds on our ponds and most of them breed on Adams Lake. Interestingly, the Mallard is strongly migratory in the northern parts of its breeding range, and winters far south. Adult Mallards are about 15 inches in length and have a wingspan of about 36 inches. Adult males are gray, have a yellow bill, green head, and a white ring around the neck. Females, however, have an orange bill, a pale, brown face, and a brown or tan color.

Canada Geese flocks in Ferrum normally peak in late winter and spring and are composed mostly of a non-migratory subspecies that were brought from the Rocky Mountains to supplement our native migratory species for hunting. They breed in our area, but not on the ponds at Ferrum College. They are 16-25 inches in length and have a wing span of 50-68 inches. Canada Geese have black bills, a black head, and a black neck. Their back and upper wings are brown and they have a patch of white feathers that extends up from their throat to their cheek.

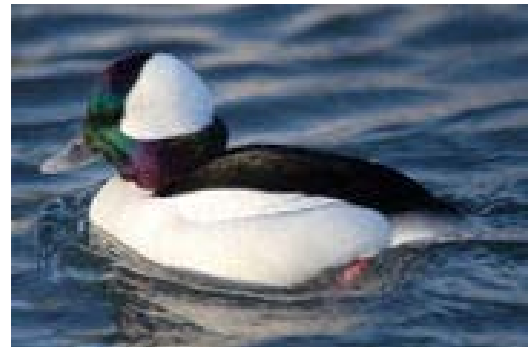
Bufflehead Ducks breed in North American boreal forests and Aspen Parkland regions, from the interior of Alaska to western Quebec, southwards to Wyoming, Oregon, and California. There are substantial populations of Bufflehead along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. They arrive in our area around Thanksgiving and leave in April.

Of course, there is that large gray duck often observed waddling around campus (affectionately called "waddles" by some). Waddles is a female Muscovy Duck which appears to be semi-domesticated. Wild Muscovy Ducks are

native to Central and South America.

Less common bird species that can usually be seen each year on campus ponds include the Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Green Heron (Summer), Great Blue Heron (all year), and Wood Duck (Chapman Pond during spring migration).

Grebes are small diving birds with thin beaks. They often visit Adams Lake during the winter and spring but do not linger long. Great Blue Herons can often be seen wading in the shallow water on either of the ponds looking to spear a fish. Green herons usually are observed perched in one of the trees along the borders of the pond, most often in the summer and early fall.



Male Bufflehead Duck

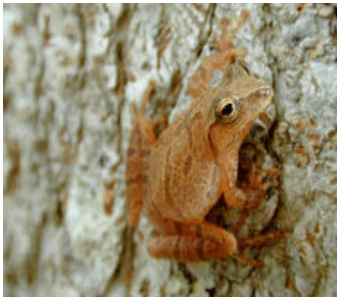
There are several species that can occasionally be observed on Ferrum ponds, especially during migration or during the winter, and include the American Coot, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Redhead Duck, Ring-necked Duck, and Snow Goose.

In addition to ducks, geese, grebes, and herons, other water birds can be found near the ponds. One can see Belted Kingfishers near these ponds or hear their rattling calls, especially at Chapman Pond. In the spring, Spotted Sandpipers can be seen stalking prey along the shoreline. Occasionally, especially during March and April, Osprey can be seen fishing over Adams Lake or Chapman Pond. This large raptor has an average body size around 22 inches and an average wingspan of 54 inches. Females tend to be bigger than males and tend to have a higher body mass. Ospreys have a hooked beak, a white chin, breast, throat, and belly, and a brown tail with white bands.

Let the peeping begin!

Jessica Spencer

The Spring Peeper is a small tree frog and is found throughout the eastern United States. They are usually found in ponds, marshes, and other damp areas. Outside of the breeding season, they can sometimes be found in woodland ponds. They grow to about 1.5 inches long. They have a dark cross on their backs, almost like the shape of an X, and not all have these markings. They vary in color, but are mostly tan, brown, olive green, or gray. Males are smaller and usually have dark throats. Females are a lighter shade than the male. Spring Peepers eat small insects such as ants, spiders, and water bugs. The Spring Peepers predators include, the great diving beetle, snakes, larger



frogs, and skunks. They breed in southern areas from about mid-October to March. The breeding always depends on the temperature. There are two subspecies of the spring peeper; the northern and southern peeper. The Spring Peeper usually lays anywhere from 900-1000 eggs. During

the winter they hibernate under logs and loose bark. They are nocturnal frogs, so they are usually heard rather than seen. They make high whistling calls to one another for mating purposes. This is why they received the name the "peeper" because of their squeaking sounds. Spring Peepers are seldom seen by humans so if you ever happen to see the Spring Peeper make sure to take a picture because they are adorable little creatures.

Another more cold-hardy frog

Stephanie Boyd

Rana sylvatica, wood frogs, are some of the most cold-adapted frogs in North America. They are commonly found in woodlands across their range and tend to be very territorial, occupying an area of about 100 m². During the summertime they can be found in woodlands or forested swamps, but in the winter they are found under stones, stumps and leaf litter. However, during their breeding season they are found in woodland ponds called vernal pools, and are often the first frog to begin calling.

The size of a wood frog ranges from 3.5 to 7.6 cm. The females are always much larger than the males. They are usually brown, tan, and rust colored. Occasionally, some may have shades of green, yellow or gray. They are often referred to as the frog with the "robber's mask" because of the black patch that extends over their tympanum to the base of their front limb. Their diet includes a variety of insects and other small invertebrates. We can do our part to help them by creating frog-friendly habitats around our homes.

A touch of bluebird

Todd Fredericksen

Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialis sialis*) are much beloved songbirds in our area. In early Spring, bluebirds seek out nesting areas that are naturally provided by tree cavities. Many people will supplement these cavities by placing bluebird nesting boxes

on their land because they want to help in conservation efforts for this species and enjoy watching these colorful birds.

Bluebirds are indeed colorful! The head, back and tail of the male bird is bright blue (not to be confused with the darker indigo bunting) with a bright orange

band across its neck and chest along with a white underbelly. The female is brownish above, with a white throat, blue tail, and orange underbelly. You may often hear bluebirds before you see them. Listen for a "ch-chur-churlee" in early Spring. The preferred habitat of bluebirds is open country with scattered trees. They nest along the borders of fields and can often be seen along roadsides. They feed on insects and other arthropods in open fields, but will often eat berries and other fruits during the winter, similar to their cousin, the American Robin. In late March and April, bluebird females will lay 4-6 pale blue eggs in a loose cup of grass and other plant materials. Bluebirds build their nests in less than a week. Incubation is carried out by the female. The male brings food to the female. The young hatch in 14 days and fledglings leave the nest between 15-20 days. Bluebirds may produce 2-3 broods per year.

Bluebirds had suffered population declines, much of these due to competition with invasive exotic species such as the House Sparrow and European Starlings. Bluebirds, however, are making a comeback as many people have rallied around this species to create artificial nesting boxes that enhance their reproductive success. Bluebird boxes are easy to build. For a simple box design, visit:

<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/eastblue/enestbox.htm>

When locating bluebird boxes, mount nest boxes 4 to 6 feet above the ground on a metal or wooden post. Aluminum posts help deter nest predators, such as rat snakes. Box openings should be on the lee side of prevailing winds and receive sunlight throughout a large portion of the day. They should be in open areas, such as on the edges of fields, but not too far away from some vegetation cover. Because bluebirds defend territories, boxes should be located no closer than 100 yards apart.

