



Ferrum Nature Society

Dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of our natural world

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Events:

March 19th Waterfowl Count:

Rain/snow date is March 20th.

Counts will be made by various groups at ponds and lakes throughout the area.

Following the count a **woodcock watch and cookout** will be held at Nell and Todd's at 5pm. Please plan to join us!!

Nature's Events

- Red Maples will be flowering soon coloring the forest with tints of red. Keep a watch out for the creamy white flowers of Serviceberry as well.
- Many wildflowers appear this month – violets, daffodils, toothwort, hepatica and bloodroot among others.
- Frogs and Toads will be breeding in mass this month. We have already found green frogs in our pond and American toads should be emerging soon.

Sky Calendar:

March 18: Saturn is the "star" shining to the left of the moon.

March 19: The moon is at apogee – the point in its orbit at which it is the greatest distance from the Earth.

March 20: the spring equinox occurs at 5:33am EST – the point at which the sun crosses the equator heading north.



Wildflower Weeds

– Todd Fredericksen

Some of our earliest blooming wildflowers are difficult to spot. They are low-growing plants with small, delicate flowers that may be cryptically interspersed among thin areas of lawns or patches of exposed soil. Some of these plant species may start flowering in early February, often near the foundation of buildings or on south-facing slopes. Hard frosts and periodic coverings of snow do not seem to deter these hardy little plants.

Most of these late-winter, early-spring bloomers are exotics that are native to Europe. Many are troublesome weeds of farmer's fields and waste places. They are also ruderal species, species that require disturbed ground to thrive, since they are poor competitors. They follow the spring ephemeral strategy, completing their

reproductive life cycle before trees leaf out and most other plants start to grow as well.

Henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*), in the mint family, is one of the earliest blooming wildflowers. Its purplish, irregular flowers are only 1/4 inch long and the entire plant rarely grows to one foot in height. I observed henbit flowering on Valentine's Day this year. Another alien in the mint family is purple dead nettle (*Lamium purpureum*). This interesting-named plant blooms a bit later than henbit and its small purple flowers are difficult to detect among the purple-tinged upper leaves of the plant. Yet another early mint is the sprawling ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) with small blue flowers and kidney-shaped leaves.

The winner for the earliest flower appearance probably goes to a member of the mustard family, small-flowered bittercress (*Cardamine parviflora*). I observed this plant with its tiny white flowers in bloom on February 4.

Another early bloomer to watch is spiny lettuce (*Lactuca scariola*). This dandelion-like plant was observed blooming on February 22 on the mulch beds outside of Garber. By March 15, some of these plants will already be dispersing seeds. Yet another dandelion-like plant is coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*) that often covers roadsides in late February with its yellow flowers and then later sends up leaves that are the size and shape of a "colt's foot". The extract of these new leaves is an excellent cough suppressant.

A notorious weed of agricultural fields is common chickweed (*Stellaria media*). Chickweed flowers in March and can quickly form a carpet on fields that were tilled during the previous fall.

Waking at Home – Cy Dillon

- When I am released
- From the dark current of sleep
- Substance returns
- Like a favorite memory
- To this bluff
- With its stream below
- And birds always

Awake before me in the first light
Their calls persistent
As the voice of the river itself
Whose embrace receives me
Raises me
To the day

Spring Peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*)

- Travis Davis



The spring peeper, *Pseudacris crucifer*, is an amphibian that belongs to the Hylidae family. It is a small frog that reaches a length of $\frac{3}{4}$ " to $1\frac{1}{2}$ " when fully mature. Though small in stature they produce a very high pitch call that can be heard for long distances. Spring peepers are distinguished from other frogs by the "X" marking they have on their back. It is not uncommon to see spring peepers that are tan, brown, olive green, or gray. Also, when identifying the sex of this frog keep in mind that females are lighter in color while males are smaller with a darker throat coloration.

Spring peepers start to emerge from winter hibernation around this time of year. They begin to breed in March, when warmer spring rains fall, and continue to do so until June. The females typically lay around 900 eggs per clutch, but up to 1,000 eggs are possible. Eggs are laid in shallow ponds or vernal pools with vegetation. Tadpoles hatch in a couple of weeks and tadpoles metamorphosize into small frogs in 3-4 months. With such large clutch sizes, young peepers are susceptible to predation by many animals including diving beetles, snakes and larger frogs. They are one of the most abundant frogs in the eastern half of North America, stretching from Florida to southeast Canada and west to Texas. However, few people actually get to see a spring peeper due to the fact that they are primarily nocturnal. However, most of us should be hearing them soon as they start their spring time chorus.

One interesting thing about spring peepers is their ability to freeze while they are hibernating then emerge from hibernation unscathed. They literally freeze. Their blood and intestinal fluid freezes while the cells and water surrounding the cells does not. Their capability is due to specialized proteins and high glucose levels throughout their body.

Eastern Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum tigrinum*) - Shawn White



The eastern tiger salamander belongs to the burrowing group of salamanders known as mole salamanders. It is the largest mole salamander in Virginia. Adults can grow to be up to 10 inches long, with the tail comprising over half of their length. They have broad heads with widely separated eyes. They are dark brown to black with olive-yellow to brownish-yellow splotches on their backs, sides, and bellies. They get their name from the presence of 12-13 costal grooves down the sides of the bodies, giving the suggestion of "tiger stripes".

Tiger salamanders inhabit woodlands, meadows, marshes and even suburban areas as long as aquatic breeding areas are

live mostly underground. They are nocturnal and only come above ground at night after summer rains and during the breeding season. In late winter these salamanders emerge from hibernation, leave their burrows and migrate to ancestral breeding habitats which consist of ponds, slow moving streams, and shallow lake edges. The aquatic larvae are usually greenish or grayish, speckled with black, with prominent feathery gills behind the head. They are voracious predators, feeding on aquatic invertebrates, small fish fry and even on the larvae of other salamander species. Adult salamanders eat insects, earth worms, slugs, snails, and smaller amphibians. Adults can live 12-15 years.

The eastern tiger salamander is widespread throughout North America, but it is listed as endangered in the state of Virginia. This salamander only occurs in four counties throughout Virginia: Augusta, Isle of Wight, Matthews, and York. There are only two known active breeding sites in Augusta, and Isle of Wight counties. Habitat destruction and modification are the primary threats to the eastern tiger salamander. Pond drainage, chemical runoff, and stocking of predatory fish in breeding sites are also threatening this species. Logging and urbanization may result in unsuitable habitat for adults, however, they are more tolerant of habitat disturbances than many other salamander species. This species was listed as state endangered in 1987.