

## *Wild Times At Pine Hill Park Spring, 2016 Summary*

The first day of spring was the first time in 3 and a half years that while hiking from Giorgetti Rink to Muddy Pond, I did not see nor hear a single bird! But, Muddy Pond itself was a different story. Paired wood ducks, mallards, Canada geese, common mergansers, and a belted kingfisher were all seen, along with painted turtles sunning themselves. Near the intersection of Carriage Trail and Redfield Farm Trail could be heard a pair of barred owls “hooting”. The last week of March was quite different with cardinals, song sparrows, northern flicker, Eastern phoebe, black-capped chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches, golden-crowned kinglets, and tufted titmouse singing, while hairy woodpeckers, yellow-bellied sapsuckers and pileated woodpeckers were drumming. Crows were harassing a young bald eagle flying over Muddy Pond, while pairs of wood ducks and Canada geese were exhibiting behaviors associated with next building on Rocky Pond. The first wildflower of the season-**Coltsfoot** was observed, as was a mating pair of Eastern newts.

The beginning of April saw the first appearance of robins in the park, with turkey vultures flying overhead. Countless trout lily leaves were also seen emerging from the forest floor throughout the whole park. Spring peepers were heard for the first time, and leaf buds were starting to appear on many forest trees. Snow flurries were becoming fewer in number, with only thin patches of snow appearing here and there. A pair of Canada geese were seen nesting in an isolated cove on Rocky Pond, and **Bobcat** tracks were seen by Shelly Lutz and Lauren White near the intersection of Stegosaurus and Redfield Trails. And this sighting happened just a few days after both of them had taken a wildlife tracking workshop. Ruffed grouse could be heard drumming in a few places in the forest. Rocky Pond water level continued to rise due to the increasing size of the beaver dam at the outlet of the Pond.

Mid-April was a time of colder temperatures and an increasing number of flurries. Frog calls decreased substantially with the declining temperatures. The hermit thrush was seen for the first time this season, Canada geese continued to sit on the nest at Rocky Pond, and Wood ducks were a common sight on Muddy Pond. Mourning doves could be heard “cooing” at Rocky Pond, and wood frogs could be heard croaking. Tadpoles were seen swimming at Rocky Pond for the first time this season. Bumblebees (there are 18 species in VT) were a common sight, along with large numbers of other small flying insects. Anglewing butterflies were seen above the old quarry along with mourning cloak butterflies. The beautiful blue iridescent tiger beetle (They have a nasty bite!) could be seen on the trails in large numbers. The spring migrating warblers were beginning to be seen with palm and yellow-rumped warblers being two of the most common. And garter snakes were seen for the first time. And, of course, with the arrival of the spring migrants, you have the arrival of their predators, especially the broad-winged hawk.

Towards the end of April, chipmunks were a common sight, yellow-bellied sapsuckers were busy building nests, red-eyed vireos were back, and trailing arbutus(flowers usually hidden by leaves) were in flower. By this time of year, fern fiddleheads are emerging, chipmunks and squirrels are a common sight, Canada mayflowers are emerging from the forest floor, and the pair of Canada geese was still on the nest at Rocky Pond. New flowers were beginning to appear on a regular basis, along with new songbirds including the rufous-sided towhee and solitary vireo. Water level at Rocky Pond continued to rise with the increasing size of the beaver dam.

The first week of May had me listening to the beautiful evening song of the hermit thrush for the first time this season, and Canada mayflowers were now becoming the dominant floor flower, replacing the

declining Trout Lily. Blood root was beginning to flower. Had an early morning birdwalk on May 7<sup>th</sup>, and was surprised at how quiet the forest was. Thought I'd see and hear a lot more birds. Birds seen included: turkey vulture, cardinal, white-breasted nuthatches, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, crow, slate-colored junco, robins, American goldfinch, hairy woodpeckers, chipping sparrow, pileated woodpeckers, blue jay, tufted titmouse, black and white warbler, ovenbird, hermit thrush, Canada geese, mourning doves, wood ducks, and red-winged blackbirds. Wildflowers are starting to appear in large numbers, and new birds are starting to appear for the first time, including the black-throated blue warbler, least flycatcher and yellow-throated vireo. More and more trees are starting to "leaf out", Lauren White saw a snapping turtle near the Rocky Pond beaver dam, and the geese at Rocky Pond mysteriously disappeared. I did receive an unconfirmed report that a pair of geese and two goslings had been seen at Rocky Pond towards the middle of May. Many wildflowers are in flower this time of year trying to beat the "leaf out" when they will be shaded, and the sunlight hitting their leaves decreases dramatically. Saw my first Red Eft walking across a trail towards the beginning of May.

In Mid-May, one could hear gray tree frogs croaking, or see Mourning Cloak, Juvenile's or cabbage white butterflies throughout the forest, especially along the trails. Black flies were starting to become a nuisance, and I received the first of MANY reports of Osprey at both Rocky and Muddy Ponds. Light flurries were experienced as late as May 16<sup>th</sup>, the same date that I first observed flowering Jack-In-The-Pulpit flowers. Mid-May seemed to be the apex of bird activity this year. Many birds could be seen or heard on any day and still, new birds were arriving including, yellowthroat, great crested flycatcher, Eastern pewee, and scarlet tanager.

Late May saw the forest explode with wildflowers including forget-me-not (the bridge area near the trailhead is covered with them), common buttercup, false Solomon's seal, Solomon's seal, star flower, wild lily-of-the-valley, wild columbine, pink lady's slipper, common cinquefoil, bunchberry, slender blue-eyed grass, and clintonia. Saw my first VERY LARGE millipede on the trail near Muddy Pond. Hadn't realized they were found this far north. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, I saw a black water snake swim past me near the Rocky Pond beach rocks, then smelled a dead animal from an area where it swam from. Looking more closely, I found 5 dead black water snakes of varying sizes, coiled up together. I was wondering if they had recently emerged from their nearby winter den too weak to hunt after fasting over the winter months. It appears Muddy Pond had THREE successful wood duck nests this year. Broods of 8, 6, and 3 were seen by numerous people, throughout May and June. With all the dead trees lining Muddy Pond, this is no surprise to me. Holes in the dead trees make perfect nests, and the proximity to water allows for fledglings to make a quick run to the relative safety of water and nearby adults. On the last day of May I saw a pair(female and male) of Indigo Buntings near Trail Marker #11, but haven't seen them since.

The first week of June had David Jenne emailing to Shelly Lutz (then forwarded to me), some spectacular pictures of Osprey at Muddy Pond. They've built a temporary nest on the top of the electric wire towers at the north end of the pond. They'll go there to feed, but are not nesting. At least not this year. But, I'm going to make a guess that we are going to have a pair attempt to nest there next year. Maybe even take over the abandoned great blue heron nest on the East side of Muddy Pond. They've been a common sight at the pond, have been seen feeding there, and have been seen carrying twigs and sticks up to the temporary nest. I wait with great anticipation. Great blue herons have also been sighted at Muddy Pond, sometimes sitting on the old abandoned nest. They, too, are not nesting on the pond. The scarlet tanager is nesting somewhere around trail marker #11. While taking a group of Rutland Middle School students on a nature hike on June 7<sup>th</sup>, we were able to call in a scarlet tanager close enough for the students to get a look at one of the most beautiful birds in America.

19 more American chestnut trees were planted in Pine Hill Park this June. There are now 41 chestnut trees in the park. They are weeded, watered, sprayed (organic garlic oil) on a regular basis. For the most part, trees planted last year are doing quite well. A barred owl was seen and heard “hooting” every day for over a week towards the beginning of June just above the old rock quarry. Haven’t heard it there for a while. But, if you go up to Rocky Pond at dusk, you’re sure to hear them “hooting” on the far side of the pond, and see the beaver swimming back and forth from its dam.

By mid-June, Christmas fern spores were maturing, fireflies were seen for the first time, and new butterflies were seen including red and white admirals, and the Eastern tiger swallowtail. New flowers continue to emerge (Stay away from the Wild Parsnip at Rocky Pond), garter snakes are seen on a regular basis, male deer are just starting to grow their antlers, the cottontail rabbit is once again feeding on the Crusher trail, and bullfrogs can sometimes be heard in chorus croaking, which can be VERY loud, when dozens are croaking at the same time as commonly happens this time of year on Muddy Pond. Black flies are having a field day, with mosquitoes and deer flies trying to get their share of our blood.

That's it for this season. Hope you're all enjoying your time at Pine Hill Park. Please stay on the trails, and don't hesitate to email me ([testill@cksrutland.org](mailto:testill@cksrutland.org)) with any interesting wildlife sightings. I'll be sure to put them in my next summary.