

Wild Times at Pine Hill Park Spring, 2017 Summary

The days around the first week of spring saw major snow storms come through Pine Hill Park. Even then, spring was beginning to show its face. Hairy woodpeckers were drumming, small midges were commonly seen flying throughout the forest, a pair of mallards flew overhead and I even saw a caterpillar crawling across the surface of the snow. By the start of April, patches of bare ground could be seen on sun-facing slopes, tufted titmouse were singing their “peter peter” song, mourning doves were “cooing”, parts of Rocky and Muddy ponds were finally free of ice, Canada geese were exhibiting courtship behavior, and cardinals were singing.

By April 9th, the snow and pond ice was pretty much gone. Wood ducks and common mergansers were seen at Muddy Pond and a pair of river otters was seen mating near the shore. I was taken aback at just how violent river otters can be during mating. I felt bad for a nearby second male who crossed its paws, and then laid its head upon the paws in utter disappointment. Just as in years past, the first butterfly to appear this time of year was the mourning cloak.

During the second week of April, yellow-bellied sapsuckers had returned, black-capped chickadees were seen building a nest, song sparrows were singing at Rocky Pond, and both turkey vultures and 3 ospreys were seen at Muddy Pond. Spring peepers were “peeping” at both ponds, and Eastern newts could be seen mating in the near shore waters. Painted turtles were seen sunning themselves at both ponds, and Rocky Pond was seen to have a dramatic rise in its water level due to the beavers of Rock Pond rebuilding their dam. Garter snakes and northern water snakes had emerged from their hibernations in large numbers, many trees were flowering, and trailing arbutus was in flower.

On April 19th I witnessed a yellow-bellied sapsucker drilling a nest hole in the same tree sapsuckers have used for nesting for the last three years. Each year, a new hole is drilled. Robins were now a common sight in the park, along with hermit thrushes and yellow-rumped warblers.

On April 23rd, Eastern phoebes were seen building nests in the old quarry buildings just as they do every year. On that same day, 3 ospreys were seen at Muddy Pond, flying back and forth with sticks to the nest they had started last year atop a power pole. Large numbers of flowers were appearing including trailing arbutus, trout lily and wood anemone, along with butterflies such as the painted lady and Eastern pine elfin. Towards the end of April, on a night hike to Rocky Pond, American toads and wood frogs could be heard calling for the first time.

May 4th found many trees “leafing out”, barred owls “hooting”, broad-winged hawks mating, and gray tree frogs calling. An early morning bird walk on May 13th included sightings of the American redstart, black-capped chickadees, Canada geese, tufted titmouse, cardinal, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, bluejay, red-eyed vireo, hermit thrush, ovenbird, white-breasted nuthatches, and yellow-rumped warblers.

On May 20th, I saw my first magnificent scarlet tanager, and indigo bunting of the season. At Muddy Pond, while one osprey sat on the nest, another was bringing small branches and twigs to the increasingly large nest.

On May 30th, 36 Jack-in-the-Pulpit seedlings were planted along the lower Giorgetti trail in an attempt to increase their numbers in the park. Can't wait until next year to see the trail lined with those interesting looking flowers.

On June 3rd, the male osprey could be seen bringing food back and forth to the much larger female who was sitting in the nest, probably incubating recently laid eggs. And later that day while watering American Chestnut trees, I accidentally came upon a hermit thrush nest near the base of one of the trees with four blue eggs inside. Pink lady slippers, bluets and common buttercups were all in flower.

On June 7th, 10 more American Chestnuts were planted, bringing the total number of such trees to 47. By mid-June, baby sapsuckers could be heard “chirping” at the nest I had written about earlier. 36 Buttonbush flower seedlings were planted along the shores of Rocky Pond to increase their numbers and perhaps attract more waterfowl to the pond. Buttonbush seeds are a favorite food of many waterfowl. And the flowers are beautiful, white, star-like spheres.

On June 16th, I found 3 hatchlings in the Hermit thrush nest. A few weeks later, the nest was found to be abandoned. I'll be keeping a close eye on the osprey next and crossing my fingers that they'll have a successful nesting. What a thrill that will be. No sign of osprey's chicks during the last week of spring.

That's it for this report. Every time I hike the trails of Pine Hill Park, I see something of great interest. Walk lightly and slowly. Be as quiet as possible, and don't forget to look up. You're sure to see something that will make you want to come back and discover more. Please stay on the trails and enjoy the wildlife at Pine Hill Park