

The Naturalist's Spring Almanac

By Andy Kapinos, Seasonal Field Naturalist

March

1 SKUNK CABBAGE begins to emerge around this time. It is a "thermogenic" plant that can generate its own heat to melt ice and snow, facilitating early growth and flowering. Its flowers use a garbage-like smell to attract early-emerging, carrion-feeding insects for pollination.

15 HOODED Mergansers are migrating from wintering grounds on lakes and coastal waters farther south to breeding sites on freshwater marshes and ponds throughout the state. If you live near any small body of freshwater, this is a perfect time to put up a nest box for the first arrivals.



28 WOODCHUCKS have begun to emerge from hibernation. Males leave their dens a few weeks before females to defend breeding territories. Keep an eye out for black (melanistic) woodchucks at Gilsland Farm: a population of these alternately-colored individuals lives in the meadows.

April

5 On rainy nights when the temperature is above 40°F, amphibians like **SPOTTED SALAMANDERS** and **WOOD FROGS** will begin to migrate to vernal pools to mate and lay eggs. Watch out for them on roads near wetlands! More info: vernalpools.me



12 MOURNING CLOAK butterflies begin to emerge on warm days, soaking up the sun with their dark reddish-brown wings. They overwinter in bark crevices as fully-formed adults, meaning they can live for more than 11 months, one of the longest lifespans of any butterfly. They mainly lay their eggs on native willow species, like Black Willow.



20 ATLANTIC PUFFINS are arriving at nesting colonies off the Maine coast from Eastern Egg Rock down to Machias Seal Island. They spend the rest of their lives on the high seas of the Atlantic Ocean, but return to these rocky islands to breed.



RED MAPLE SEED

Photo: Andy Kapinos

May

1 RED MAPLES are dropping their seeds now, especially on windy days. This is the most numerous tree species in eastern North America, and now is a great time to spot it with its bright red seeds and unfurling leaves.

14 BOBOLINKS are now returning to Maine from their wintering grounds in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina, completing one of the longest migrations of any passerine in the Americas. These birds need expansive grassy fields to breed, and can benefit greatly from small changes to mowing schedules. Learn more at: somensetswcd.org/ag-allies.

21 FLYCATCHERS like Eastern Wood-Pewees, Alder Flycatchers, Great Crested Flycatchers, and Eastern Kingbirds have returned to their breeding grounds to feast on hatches of flying insects.

28 SEA MILKWORT is now blooming at coastal sites, often found sprawling over sandy ledges. This unique member of the Primrose family has fleshy leaves, like many other salt-tolerant species, and flowers with no petals.

