

The Naturalist's Spring Almanac

By Field Naturalist Stacia Brezinski

March

11 Look and listen for **BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) group displays as pairs and single birds navigate the acquisition of breeding territory. As few as three or as many as twenty birds may move about an area calling and "bobbing," with bodies stretched and beaks pointed upward.

19 **CANADA JAYS** (*Perisoreus canadensis*) are already incubating eggs in northern forests here in Maine. These extremely cold-hardy birds are one of the earliest nesters in the state. Stored food helps supplement meager late-winter food sources. Early breeding may give young a head start on learning skills that help these clever corvids survive their first year.



20 **SENSITIVE FERNS** (*Onoclea sensibilis*) release spores in March and April. Fertile fronds look like stalks covered in little brown beads, which are really modified leaflets, tightly curled around spores. These grew the previous spring, shortly after the sterile leafy fronds unfurled.

April

1 **ICE-OUT** is beginning on Maine lakes. Ice-out dates have been recorded in Maine for more than 200 years. Climate change is accelerating ice-out, meaning earlier phytoplankton activity which can lead to harmful algal blooms.



SURF SCOTERS

Photo: Jeff Schmoyer

16 Look out for **MIGRATORY SEA DUCKS** off the coast, including White-winged, Surf, and Black Scoters, among others, congregating during their northerly migration to breeding grounds in Canada. The location (or absence) of white feather patches can help to identify each species from a distance.



PINK LADY'S-SLIPPER

Photo: Stacia Brezinski

May

10 Native **ALLEGHENY MOUND ANTS** (*Formica exsectoides*) are building and expanding colonies after waking from hibernation. Mounds several feet tall and wide, built in sunny areas, keep eggs and larvae warm. The ants may even build thatched roofs from small bits of twig to protect mounds from extreme weather.

26 Several species of **LADY'S-SLIPPERS**, also known to many as moccasin flowers, are blooming in acidic soils found in Maine. These plants rely on mycorrhizal fungi to nourish their seeds until they're capable of acquiring nutrients on their own, at which point the adult sends nutrients to the fungi. Plants take years to reach maturity, and can live for twenty years. Folks are urged to leave flowers be, as their low pollination rate makes populations vulnerable.

31 **ATLANTIC HORSESHOE CRABS** (*Limulus polyphemus*) are 450-million-year-old arthropods with nine eyes. They use their fragile tails, called telsons, to right themselves when flipped over by waves. Look for Atlantic Horseshoe Crabs mating on sandy beaches and mud flats in May and June.