

April

TS Eliot has famously called April "the cruelest month". He certainly wasn't referring to northern Wisconsin.

The traditionally accepted origin of the word April comes from the Roman verb *aperire*-to open-as in being the season when flowers and trees begin to "open". With high and low temperature averages of 59 and 28, and an average of 2.48" of rainfall, our neck of the woods truly does begin to "open" in April!

Many wildflowers begin "opening" in April, but one of the most obvious are the carpets of trillium seen along the local roadsides. This stark white flower serves as the official flower and emblem of the province of Ontario and it's a protected species in many states, making them illegal to pick. The most common "large flowered trillium" is the largest of four species found in Wisconsin. The white of the flower turns pink with age.

Our many lakes usually "open" in April. Ice out brings immediate and exciting opportunities for fauna. Geese aggressively build nests, loons find open water on their trek to nesting grounds and many other waterfowl will transition through, providing us with rare sightings. I find it especially thrilling to see and feel the muskellunge go through their spawning cycle while seated in a kayak. Shallow sandy shorelines are preferred spawning habitat.

April can also present some challenges. Fire is a real concern due to the lack of new green vegetation and relative high winds. Caution is the operative word with any campfires or yard cleanup. Thankfully, the village of Barnes provides opportunity for free disposal of yard waste.

Unfortunately, the warmer weather and loss of snow cover means the beginning of tick season. The little critters are more than an annoyance-they're a potential source of several serious illnesses. Adult ticks can be active anytime the temperature gets above 40-45 degrees. For the latest updates, go to Google and put in the following: labs.russell.wisc.edu/wisconsin-ticks

Finally, a personal highlight of April means PEEPERS. Spring peepers are a tiny type of chorus frog that produce a very loud sleigh bell-like sound around wet areas. The nightly chorus that you hear on warm spring nights is a mating ritual. The males are calling out the females. The huge bubble below their mouth is actually the vocal sac inflating as it sings. These frogs produce their own antifreeze so that up to 70% of the frog's body can freeze. These tiny frogs reach a maximum of 1.5" and are identified by a dark X marking across their back.

The aggressive geese honking, nightly chorus of spring peepers, and blankets of trillium are surely welcome harbingers of spring in northern Wisconsin.

Marty Olson