



# Signs of Spring

The spring season in northern Illinois is a time of great change. Changing weather and changing daylight bring new sightings every week to our area. Some spring wildflowers only bloom for a couple weeks and migrant wildlife may stop for only a day. In order to see it all, you need to get out often. Here are just a few highlights of the season.

Skunk cabbage

## March

March may still seem very much like winter, but signs of spring abound. As wetlands thaw, migrating waterfowl can be seen in the open water. **Sandhill cranes** fly overhead in flocks from 15–100, announcing their return with a loud trilling guttural call. Male **red-winged blackbirds** stake their claim, calling “konkareeee” to all who will listen. Early wildflowers poke up from the still cold ground – **spring beauties, toothwort,** and **trout lily** are some of the first.



Spring Beauty

The first butterfly of the season can be spotted in March. Not because it has migrated back to our area, nor because it has already undergone steps of its total metamorphosis, but because it has overwintered in its adult butterfly state. The first warm days in March are just enough to rouse the **mourning cloak**. A dark butterfly with a light border around the outer edges of its wings, the mourning cloak flits around looking for tree

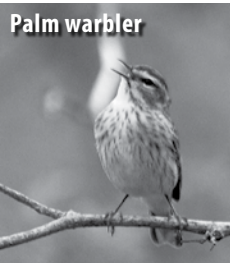


wounds oozing early season sap so that it can lap up the sap for energy.

Bob Williams

## April

April brings a carpet of wildflowers to our woodlands and swelling buds on the trees. These buds in turn attract dozens of migrating warblers of all different colors and patterns. You will need binoculars and some patience as they will rarely sit still for you, but the views are rewarding. Woodland birds that will stay with us for the summer season are also busy building their nests, while the eggs of wetland birds are already hatching.



Palm warbler

Bob Williams

The thawing of the land in open areas means the return of the **13-lined ground squirrel**. These rodents have been hibernating since some time in late October or November and are now ravenous for some green grass. They can often be seen in mowed grass areas. The holes that lead to a complex system of underground tunnels are small and usually do not have piles of excavated dirt near one end as a ground hog hole would have; this is



## May

because the ground squirrel spreads the soil around and stomps it down. Often mistaken for prairie dogs, ground squirrels do exhibit some of the same behavior as their western cousins. You may frequently spot a designated adult standing on its hind legs, serving as look-out for the family. If danger is spotted, they will emit a high-pitched squeal to let the others know to seek shelter underground.



The warmer weather brings more wildflowers, more migrants, and more animals preparing their nests. It also brings out the cold-blooded reptiles. In May, watch your step on the trails. Traveling sometimes across roads and trails, tiny **painted turtles** are headed for wetlands. Only the size of a half dollar coin, these young turtles hatched late last summer. They then waited out the winter buried in the same area where their mother left them. When May's warmth thaws the ground, the turtles emerge and seek out a wetland home.

**FIND MORE SIGNS OF SPRING**  
See page 24 "Searching for Spring,"  
or page 33 for "Color of Coral"



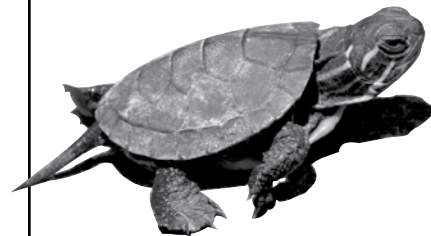
# ENVIRONMENTAL ADVENTURES

## Signs of Spring

By the end of a long, cold, snowy winter it may feel like spring is never going to arrive. However, if you pay attention to all the clues in nature, you will crack the code to find out that warm weather really is on its way. Be a nature detective this spring, and search for clues that spring is arriving.

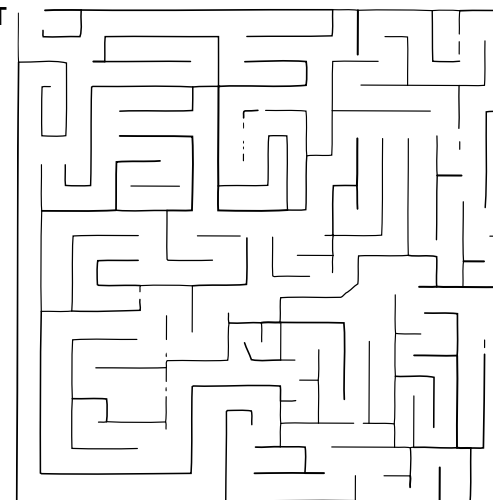
## Turtle Maze

Painted turtles hatch in late summer and stay underneath the ground during winter. In the spring they emerge in search of a wetland. Help the turtle find its wetland below.



Take a hike on the Marsh Loop Trail at Glacial Park this May to try to spot baby turtles on their way to the marsh. Feel free to take pictures if you are lucky enough to spot one, but remember just observe, don't disturb.

START

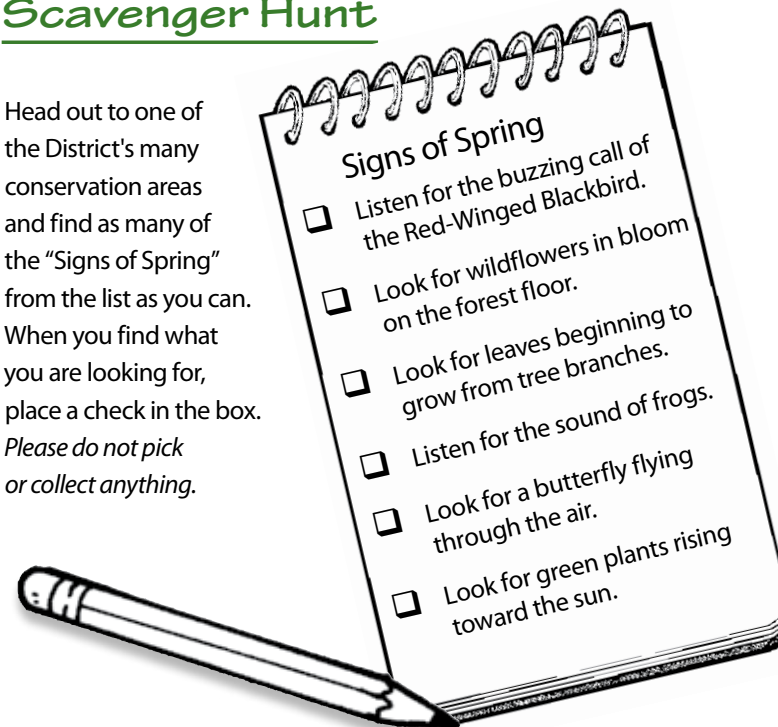


END



## Scavenger Hunt

Head out to one of the District's many conservation areas and find as many of the "Signs of Spring" from the list as you can. When you find what you are looking for, place a check in the box. *Please do not pick or collect anything.*



### Signs of Spring

- Listen for the buzzing call of the Red-Winged Blackbird.
- Look for wildflowers in bloom on the forest floor.
- Look for leaves beginning to grow from tree branches.
- Listen for the sound of frogs.
- Look for a butterfly flying through the air.
- Look for green plants rising toward the sun.

## FUN FACTS

In spring, the Earth's axis is tilted toward the sun, increasing the number of daylight hours and bringing warmer weather that causes plants to bring forth new growth.



## READING CORNER

**Colorful Spring**  
by Erin Moran and Danny Pickett

**It's Spring!** by Linda Glaser