

BOREAL BITS

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APRIL – Week 4

"I'm glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in." Aldo Leopold

The best way to know what we can expect from any given time period is to know what we experienced during this time period in another year. This week we are looking at the last week in April and our reference is the year 1998.

In this year the ospreys returned on April 22 and since I had been expecting them any time between the 20th and this date, I was getting pretty anxious by the time they finally showed up since migration is fraught with danger. After all, the ospreys make a very long journey, some as far as Columbia, in South America; they don't like to winter in snow. Also the first year chicks find their way to Warmland without the aid of an informed and experienced parent. Then the young ones stay in their wintering area throughout the following summer and return to the breeding grounds to spend their third summer.

I first saw the ospreys as two of them were chasing a bald eagle over Old Fort Island. I hurried to Osprey Rock, an observation spot, and was pleased to see one land on the nest and call loudly. Ten minutes later another osprey arrived and landed on top of the first and either attempted copulation or the behaviour was part of a courtship ritual.

This was the week that I had a ‘spirit experience.’ I don’t know how else I should term it. I had been scrambling through some pretty dense bush—not a happy experience at the best of time—when I came upon a beaver pond. On the far side of the water were two deer, a doe and her last year’s fawn. The doe walked a few metres into the water while the fawn rooted among the emergent greenery along the shore. In front of the doe and towards me, was a blue heron stalking denizens of the pond. To the right of the heron was a pair of mallards, he handsome in his resplendent courtship plumage and she magnificent in her own way. The three species were within my line of vision at the same time and framed against the budding forest and a beautiful spring sky. It was breathtaking but alas, it lasted for less than a minute before the ducks paddled away and the deer decided to forage elsewhere. By the time I prepared my camera for a true “National Geographic” moment, it had passed. However, I don’t need the photograph; the scene is engraved on my memory forever.



photo by Phil Burke

It seems that by the fourth week in April most migrants are back except for the warblers who must wait to ensure good weather. A kingfisher chattered past me as I walked the river’s edge. A flicker, that along with the sapsucker is one of our two migrating woodpeckers, is back working the soil for ants. If the sapsuckers are back, that means the hummingbirds must be back or soon will be for it is the former that provides sap wells in tree bark that keep the small hummers alive until flowers bloom.

We watched with interest as a crow gathered sticks from the neighbour's front yard. It made a little pile and then attempted to carry them away. However, one or two sticks inevitably slipped from its grasp. The crow was not to be deterred and tried again and again, stacking the sticks neatly until it could carry them successfully. Catkins were hanging from the aspens making each tree look like it had its own chipmunk tree collection.

In 1998 April ended on a high note. Rather than paraphrase my notes, I present the journal entry as it was written.

“Thursday, April 30, 1998.

Windy, sunny at 2:25 p.m. Temperature 25C in the shade.

Summer is here. The leaves are popping so fast that in a day or two everything will be green.

We have had no rain since April 13, and the bush is very dry keeping the fire crews busy. The grass is green and the robins are singing in the very early morning.

Carpenter ants are dispersing from their nests searching for new homes. I first noticed them yesterday.

It's been a week or more since our low temperatures (for a 24 hour period) went below zero.

All this and it is still April!”