

OUTDOORS

Bloodroots add white petals to woods flora

It's early May and the woods comes alive with many spring things happening. Migrant songbirds are arriving in such numbers that, when walking here, we see new ones each day.

Most active and abundant are the variety of warblers. The several species here now will swell to about two dozen kinds of many colors in a couple of weeks.

Along with these small birds, we might notice the brown and more subdued thrushes. This group almost always begins with the hermit thrush. Flycatchers leap from branches to snatch insect meals. Loud and long songs come from a couple of tiny songsters: the ruby-crowned kinglet and the elusive winter wren. We may also see an early vireo while the latest migrating sparrows stop here as well.

Songs of another type emanate from nearby vernal ponds as the vocal trio of chorus frogs, wood frogs and



LARRY WEBER
Northland Nature

spring peepers welcome the spring. These small wetlands are very full now thanks to the melting snowpack and recent rains.

Though trees in the forest are still mostly devoid of leaves, their green buds are enlarging, nearly bursting. Some small trees and shrubs are already opening their leaves and as I walk, I pass elderberry with its new compound leaves reaching out and starting to unfold. Gooseberry and honeysuckle, easily overlooked for most of the year, now stand out with opening their small leaves.

But for the most part, the woods is open and sunlight penetrates to the forest floor. Sunlit and damp, the soil is ready for growth. The time of spring

wildflowers is starting. Their time does not last long and they need to take advantage of the sunshine going all the way to the ground before the tree leaves overhead shade them. And these opportunist vernal plants take this time to grow and bloom quickly.

During walks in the first half of May, it is not unusual to see a dozen kinds in bloom. First was the hepatica that began its white or purple flowering already in April. This pacesetter is followed by pink spring beauties, yellow marsh marigolds in wet sites, purple wild gingers and the white look-alikes of wood anemone and wild strawberry.

A little later are the trout-lilies, of either white or yellow, with yellow bellworts nearby. More white is seen in the magnificent and abundant trilliums and the unique flower of Dutchman's breeches. Violets live up to their name with purple flowers, but also some are white and yellow.



A group of bloodroots bloom on the forest floor on a May day. Note eight white petals and the large leaf.

Photo by Larry Weber

But the one that gives a superb show at this time in early May is the bloodroots.

Bloodroots are also white, but unusually in the vernal flora since the flowers have eight petals. The plants pop up from the forest floor quickly with a stem wrapped in a large green leaf. Bloodroot gets its name from the sap inside the root which is bright red.

Formerly used as a dye, we seldom see this color now. But we do see the white petals, about 1.5 inches across.

Making these flowers more noticeable, they tend to live in groups. Being perennials, they will normally show up at the same sites each year. Bloodroots are not the first wildflower to bloom in spring, but they are the first to fade and the petals seem to fall soon

after being pollinated. A seed pod develops in the center later. But now in early May, they are one of the many spring wildflowers that helps make a woods walk such a delight.

Retired teacher Larry Weber, a Barnum resident, is the author of several books, including "Butterflies of the North Woods," "Spiders of the North Woods," "Webwood" and "In a Patch of Goldenrods." Contact him via Katie Rohman at krohman@duluthnews.com.

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Qualified applicants may send letter of interest, resume, three letters of recommendation, teaching license and transcripts to: District Office, 207 Pioneer Drive, Wrenshall, MN 55797 or bpeterson@isd100.org.
Deadline: May 10, 2019

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Applicants should send a letter of application and resume to Mary Marciniak, Carlton School District, PO Box 213, Carlton MN 55718 or email mmarciniak@carlton.k12.mn.us
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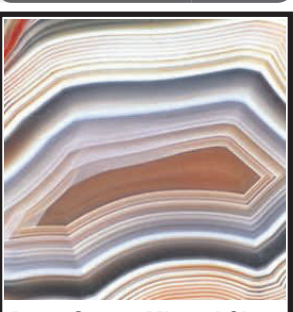
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