

## Field Notes – Second Week of April

The old north wind charged back in this week, and whipped tears to my eyes as I walked on trails in Andover and Hebron, looking for spots of color in the still-gray landscape. Sometimes I could barely see, but my trusty phone camera served as back-up eyes for me, and took clear photos when I pointed the phone in the right direction.

### Highlights of Hebron Center Trail and Gay City Trails

The pistillate (female) red maple flowers are fully open. Wow! The wind that stings my eyes is bringing pollen to these blossoms, which will develop into samaras in a few weeks. It's truly an ill wind that brings nobody good!



Red maple (*Acer rubrum*) flowers, Hebron Center Trail, April 11, 2020



**Marsh Marigold.** I always keep an eye out for Marsh Marigold in early April. I have seen it as early as April 6 (1997 and 1998). Some years, I don't catch a glimpse of it until mid or even late April. This week I saw it first on the Center Trail in Hebron. A big patch of yellow in a swampy area far from the path caught my eye, and when I drew my gaze in close to get out my phone for a photograph, I realized that there was an open flower only 10 feet from the path. It was posing for a portrait!



Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Hebron Center Trail, April 11, 2020.

The spots of red just behind it are male red maple blossoms.



**Round-leaved Violet.** I was walking with a friend (6 feet apart, of course) in Gay City last week when I spied a spot of color by the side of the trail. Looking more closely, I saw two pale yellow flowers on tender stems that had pierced through an oak leaf. I moved a couple of oak leaves away, and could see the violet's leaves beginning to unfurl. There was just enough light under the brittle leaves for them to be photosynthesizing. This was the first violet of the year for me.



Round-leaved Violet (*Viola rotundifolia*), Gay City, April 8, 2020

When I returned on April 12, there was a community of several dozen tiny violets in bloom in that one spot, and the yellow color seemed to have intensified. I saw them nowhere else on a 4-mile walk!

My field guides all describe this plant as growing in “rich woods” – in contrast to other violets that grow in “moist woods” or “open woods” or “cool woods.” This microhabitat designation – “rich woods” -- usually applies to spots where the soil is neutral or slightly alkaline, thanks to downslope movement of organic materials and minerals that collect around ledges or rock outcroppings. This little community of violets is about halfway down a slope, in a very rocky spot. There’s nothing very distinctive about the spot, but the violets know how rich the soil is!



Closeup of Round-leaved Violet.

**Marsh Blue Violet.** My second violet of this spring was the Marsh Blue Violet. These will be common along the Hop River very soon. (My guides describe its favored habitat as “wet places,” “wet meadows, springy swamps, bogs, etc.”) This one is flanked by leaves of Trout Lily, which I will be watching for along the Hop River, as well.



Marsh Blue Violet (*Viola cucullaria*), Hebron Center Trail, April 11.



**“Confederate” Violet.** This is a variant of the Common Blue Violet, which will be popping up in lawns soon. (“Meadows and moist woods, often found in dooryards.”)



Dooryard or “Confederate” Violet (*Viola sororia*), Hebron Center Trail, April 11.

**Wood Anemone.** I usually see the first blossoms between April 15 and May 1, with a median first bloom date of April 26. I have seen it earlier than this only once in 30 years! The bud is rose-colored; it opens to pure white. The number of “petals” (actually sepals) ranges from 4 to 9. Such a beauty!





Wood Anemone (*Anemone quinquefolia*), Hebron Center Trail, April 11

**Royal Fern Fiddleheads.** These fiddleheads, opening at the edge of a pond in Gay City, are the first I've seen this spring. At this stage, they might be confused with the edible Ostrich Fern fiddleheads, but there's an important difference: the edible Ostrich Fern stipe is grooved, like celery, but the inedible Royal Fern stipe is not.

Go Botany describes Royal Fern as "a cosmopolitan species [that] may be the only vascular plant found on all seven continents." It's an obligate wetland species. Nothing much eats it except the *Osmunda* borer moth.





Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*), Gay City, April 8



**Common Horsetail.** The sight of these plants does not exactly spark joy in me, but it does make me slow down – way down. I have to sit down and think about deep time in its presence. During the carboniferous period, some 350 million years ago, horsetails were forest species – tall trees – and major contributors to the coalbeds in the earth today. Their modest descendants are considered “fern allies,” since, like ferns, they reproduce via spores. The brownish stems are the fertile spore-bearing stems; the sterile green stems are photosynthetic.



Common Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), Hebron Center Trail, April 11

The north wind has probably inhibited a lot of bird species from migrating to our area this past week, but before it moved in, I did hear a Pine Warbler, and Chipping Sparrows arrived under the feeders.

The third week of April will likely bring waves of birds and many more plant awakenings. I look forward to getting out and about, and hope you are able to, too!