



Nature Notes

Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve

Your nature guide for the week June 7–June 13

Spring's bounty is beginning to be realized as young birds and mammals leave their nests and begin a more independent life. And the insects are on the rise.



Birds

The season's first crop of young birds has now left the nest, and fledglings can be heard clamouring loudly throughout the Preserve. The young **European Starlings**, noticeably brown next to their iridescent parents, are still quite “goofy” and vulnerable to predation.



Wildflowers

Around the edges of the pond and oxbow, the irises are in full bloom: the native **Blue Flag** which has been planted as part of the restoration effort; and the non-native **Yellow Iris**, which was planted accidentally in the fall of 2002.

An excellent spring growing-season this year has resulted in a lush meadow, knee-high in young goldenrod and milkweed plants. These native species have to compete with a pernicious invader called **Dog-strangling Vine** which is already flowering and stands about a metre tall.



Trees and Shrubs

Along the woodland trail you will find the elegant **Alternate-leaved Dogwood** flowering. Notable for a yellowy bark and horizontal branching (hence the common name Pagoda Dogwood, used by nurseries), it starts to bloom slightly later than the shrubby **Red-osier Dogwood**.

Most trees now have fully-expanded leaves, and these are starting to show signs of attack from herbivores which eat the leaves or suck the sap. A **Silver Maple**, planted at the south end of the Oxbow six years ago and now about four metres high, has a spectacular leaf infestation. The blood-red “warts” are **Maple Bladder Galls** caused by mites.



Frogs

Adult male **Green Frogs** are setting up territories around the perimeter of the pond in preparation for mating. Listen for the characteristic “glug” call of the male.



Insects

At first glance the frothy bubbles lodged in the leaf axils of young goldenrod and clover look like spittle. But look closely, and you will find the green nymph of **Meadow Spittlebug** hiding inside and tapping the plant's sap. The nymphs, in turn, are prey for birds, especially **Red-winged Blackbirds** and **House Sparrows**, which are busy collecting “beakfuls” of the bugs for their offspring.



Mammals

Young **Cottontail Rabbits**, just out of the burrow, are present in the meadow behind the parking lot. The best time to view the rabbits is early morning and late afternoon. Young **Chipmunks** are also making their first appearance above ground.

More Info

For more information about the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve, please visit the Preserve Web site (www.hopscotch.ca/tmwp), or phone the Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum (416 396-2819).

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