

Green Scene: Spring is here – so, get out and enjoy it!

by Elaine Golds

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Mourning Cloak butterflies are typically found near streams, where their larvae eat willow leaves.
Rosemary Taylor photo.

With spring rains hopefully giving way to more sunshine, we have now reached one of the most splendid times of the year. Trees are in blossom, tulips are adding brilliant colour to our landscapes, bumble bees are buzzing and the birds are singing. Their early morning chorus is so joyous, it can't fail to lift the hearts and hopes of most people. Watching the bright green leaves of plants unfold for a new season of growth reminds me of the myriad shapes of nature's boundless beauty. I am sure I am not alone in finding spring to be the best of all seasons. While Earth Day (April 22) reminded us of the need to be good stewards of our planet, this season is the ultimate proof of nature's unfailing resilience.

While many migratory birds are still flying north to nest throughout North America, the birds that remain here year-round are well into their nesting season. I notice the chickadees and finches tend to come in pairs

to our bird feeder, an indication they are not yet incubating eggs but have definitely chosen their mates. All three of the chickadee nest boxes in our yard are showing signs of having been “inspected” for their suitability for nesting. This year, I hope we will have both chestnut-backed and black-capped chickadees rearing babies in our backyard. One year, we were thrilled to have red-breasted nuthatches use one of our nest boxes. A pair of pileated woodpeckers is now taking turns to make frequent trips to our suet feeder; I expect they are already incubating eggs in a nest in the forest next to our local school. I should point out that we live a some distance from the north shore and greenbelt areas which means we are rarely disturbed by bears until late fall. So, our bird feeders usually stay out during the nesting season. I am glad of this opportunity to help the birds rear a new generation. However, if the bears make an early appearance in our neighborhood, then the feeders come down.

Members of the woodpecker, chickadee and nuthatch families are cavity nesters – they depend on the decaying wood of dead and dying trees to provide them with good nesting habitat. Chickadees, with their smaller beaks, usually modify a cavity already created by a larger woodpecker. These so-called secondary cavity nesters can often be tempted into using a man-made nest box as long as it has the correct dimensions. In contrast, woodpeckers rely on decaying trees in forested areas to carve out their nests. In British Columbia, these dead and decaying trees are estimated to provide critical nesting habitat for at least 65 species of birds, bats and small mammals. Many of these animals return the favour by eating insect pests. As such, decaying trees play an essential role in forest ecology. If you are interested in building and installing a chickadee nest box, instructions are available on the Burke Mountain Naturalists website (www.bmn.bc.ca, click on “publications”). While it is likely too late to tempt chickadees into using a new box this season, by next year, the birds will be familiar with the box. Alternatively, they might use it for a second nesting attempt in early summer.

If you want to get out and enjoy nature during this glorious season, there are plenty of upcoming opportunities. This Sunday at 1 pm, the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society is offering one of their monthly tree tours on the Riverview Hospital grounds. This month should offer great views of the blooming magnolias and other spring beauties. You might even catch a glimpse of some magnificent butterflies, the dark Mourning Cloak with its pale yellow border or the smaller orange and black Satyr Comma. Both of these butterflies have the unusual habit of over-wintering as adults in woodpiles which accounts for their early appearance each spring. Details of the tree tours are available at www.rhcs.org.

On Saturday, May 3 from 11am-3pm, the Port Moody Ecological Society will host their annual Fingerling Festival at their Noons Creek hatchery in Port Moody (see www.noonscreek.org for more information). With dozens of community groups in attendance and free children’s entertainment, this popular event also offers an opportunity to release young chum salmon into Noons Creek where these fish can begin their 4 year migration to the Pacific Ocean and back.

Finally, on Saturday, May 10th from 9 am-noon, the Colony Farm Park Association will offer a family birding walk as well as community garden and history tours at Colony Farm Regional Park. Because May 10th is also International Migratory Bird Day, the birding walk, which starts at 9 am, will focus on the migratory birds that return to Colony Farm each spring to rear their young. Because the next day will be Mother’s Day, this event also offers children the opportunity to plant a pot of flowers as a gift. Additional information is available at www.bmn.bc.ca.