

Each Spring Season Opens New Vistas

By LYDIA KING FRESHE
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

With each recurring season the naturalist finds new adventure and discovery on his trips afield. This does not imply that he will need to seek out some distant or unfamiliar terrain. Remember Fabre who spent a lifetime studying insects in his own backyard?

So varied is nature both in her moods and patterns that even the most familiar path can disclose something never before experienced or seen.

On a recent walk your columnist saw for the first time a shrub called "buckhorn". Its thorns suggested the hawthorn family but its three-celled fruits soon belied this relationship.

Upon tracing it through Billington's "Shrubs of Michigan" I found it to be "rhamnus cathartica" a species escaped from cultivation which has become naturalized in only a few counties in the southern part of the state.

THIS SHRUB grew some fifteen feet high. At this season it had little to recommend it except some black berries which had remained on the tree all winter as potential bird food. This is the clue to its escape from gardens.

Birds reciprocate nature's bounty by dispersing all manner of seeds hidden in colorful berries. In their sojourn through the digestive tract they are softened and prepared for their return to the soil in the role of potential plants.

Of all the voices in the spring chorus arising from marsh and pond there is none more insistent than that of the spring peeper (*Hyla crucifer*).

Others carry their eggs in dilated vocal pouches, where they hatch and develop from the tadpole stage into tiny frogs before leaving the protective mouth of the parent.

ON APRIL 6 we saw our first hermit thrush and no farther away than our own backyard. He identifies himself at once by his deliberate habit of lifting and lowering his reddish-brown tail. His presence here is only a stop-over on his migration flight to his more northern nesting grounds. A catbird's nest seen recently, was made of the usual plant fibres assembled on a foundation of cellophane and pieces of a laundry list, the various items printed on it still legible!

For the second year English sparrows are building their nests in a nearby stoptail. During the last month we have observed a tree on Woodward avenue parkway which is black each night with roosting birds. A noisy motel to which some jokers has recently added a small bird house!

ON A RECENT field trip skirting a marsh we picked up a Slender or red-bellied snake. This perfectly harmless reptile grows to no more than a foot in length, has a greyish-brown back and a coral belly.

Here nature does a fine job of contrasting her colors. At this season when just out of hibernation, he confines his foraging for slugs, grubs and small worms to the morning and late afternoon hours.

Early in the summer about a dozen babies are born alive. These, like their parents, can be easily recognized by their small size and characteristic coloring. If you are afraid of snakes try making friends with the perfectly harmless Storer.

On your spring ramblings remember there is no need to jump unless you see a Massachusetts rattler. This, Michigan's only poisonous snake, confines itself to a limited number of marshes and swamps.

THOSE OF US who heard Rachel Carson, author of "The Sea Around Us" speak at a recent meeting at Cranbrook were as charmed by her as a person as we were already captivated by her writing.

During the lecture she confirmed the opinion of many scientists that our earth is passing through another interglacial age. As a result our climate is gradually growing warmer with an attendant northward migration of many species of plants and animals.

During the last 50 years such

trees as pawpaw, hackberry, red cedar and chestnut oak have extended their northern range—as have such varying species of animals as the opossum, the cardinal and certain varieties of fish.

ALTHOUGH the woods and fields of late April have a bare and empty look every bit of living room is fast being taken up. Life is a highly competitive game and each species of plant and animal must contend for its own territory. The final population of any area will be largely determined by the amount and kind of food there is available.

On Tennis Team
Ken Wilson, 902 Puritan road, is a member of the spring tennis team at Williams College, Williamstown, Mass. A 1952 graduate of Cranbrook school, Ken is a member of Delta Upsilon fraternity.

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