

NATURE NOW By Lydia King Frehe Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Sights and Sounds Of Spring Woods

It is early May—time to steal a few hours here and there to keep our trust with the fields and woods. Almost overnight, life is reborn, stirring the water's depths, filling the sky with wings, clothing the earth with verdure.

It is now, before they are lost in the green tide of the summer's ground-cover, that the mosses come into their own. Their diminutive perfection and great variety (some 300 species in Michigan) lend a special beauty to our woods and sandy fields.

Two common species, *Mnium cupulatum* of our woods and *Funaria hygrometrica* and *Ceratodon purpureus* of our sandy fields, are very conspicuous now, their highly individual capsules rising on their red stems. Because their small size calls for the use of a hand lens, many people pass by these intriguing plants which are so important as soil and water retainers.

by their essential hunger to feed, to mate, to tend their young so that their kind will not perish from the earth. The fox squirrels from their winter's hibernation, their parental chores almost completed. Snakes, loggy from their winter's hibernation, begin their wanderings leaving their shed skins on some passing twig. Little red-bellied salamanders scuttle out from under an overturned stone or log; and the shrewing cloak butterfly, out from his winter's hibernation, drifts through the budding branches like a dark leaf.

Midges, flies and ants, lady beetles and wasps are tasting spring's new freedom and warmth. The first bees hover over the first flowers, gathering the first pollen to make bee-bread for their first broods.

FERNS are the only plants which "uncloak" their leaves (prospers). The "brittle fern" (*Cheilanthes fragilis*) is our earliest species. Its small tender fronds are already uncurled, like green whips in the rich soil at the base of old stumps and trees. By the end of May the plant withers and disappears, its spores on the underside of the fronds already ripened and discharged. "Nature made ferns for pure leaves" wrote Thoreau, the master of Walden.

Woodland plants need to bloom early before the sun is shut out by the green canopy overhead. As I walk through last year's dead leaves I call the roster of the old favorites; hepatica, bloodroot, adder's tongue, twinleaf, spring cress. This early carpet of wild flowers is a maze of white and pale pastels. Bright flowers bloom later in the stronger sunlight of roadside and field.

THE BRIGHTEST bit of color in our spring woods is the scarlet saucer (*Plectanias coccinea*). The common name is descriptive of this fungus, which, when sipped with the dicer, sends up a little cloud of ripened spores from its cup-like surface. Reaching their climax in late August, these numbers and species of this ancient order. All plants will add their beauty, color and variety to our woods and fields.

If the sights of the spring woods are beautiful to behold, its sounds are equally delightful to hear. Even day the bird chorus swells as our permanent residents are joined by a new influx of migrants. Among the birds which we saw and heard on a recent trip afield were the tufted titmouse and the winter wren. The former, a relative of the chickadee, sings in a minor note prefaced by a slightly higher grace note. Some listeners who hear the repeated syllables "Pee-to" in his common call, dub him the "Peter bird."

The winter wren's song is a succession of high warbling trills, executed with great rapidity and ending on a note so high it cannot be reproduced on a piano keyboard. Many bird lovers call it the sweetest song in the woods. Characteristic of their kind both of the winter wrens which we saw retreated underneath the roots of a beech tree where a stream had eroded the soil.

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Senator at Purdue

Bill O'Neal of Bellville trail, Birmingham, recently was elected senator-at-large of the senate at Purdue university for the 1958-60 school year in an all-campus election.

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APPROVED APRIL 7, 1958
EFFECTIVE MAY 7, 1958

PRECINCT MAP CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

POLLING PLACES

- 1—Chesterfield Fire Station
- 2—Holy Name School
- 3—Congregational Church
- 4—Municipal Building
- 5—Barrow School
- 6—Adam's Fire Station
- 7—Grand Trunk Station
- 8—High School
- 9—Pierce School
- 10—Y.M.C.A.
- 11—Tarry School
- 12—Adam's School