

LIVING

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June's sensual treats

Long, delightful days this month stimulate all our senses

The long, delightful days of June have finally arrived. They are a treat for all of the senses, but especially for our sense of smell. Early in the month, damp June mornings offer up a heady mixture of balsam poplar, lilac, cherry and freshly mown grass.



OUR CHANGING SEASONS
Drew Monkman

Later, the sweet smell of black locust blossoms fills the air. June is also synonymous with the smell of the first cut of hay as it cures in the sun. The greatest variety of nature's sounds is heard this month, as well. One of the most characteristic is the loud, bird-like call of the grey treefrog. Calling during the day as well as at night, treefrogs can also be mistaken for especially vocal crickets, except that most crickets don't call until mid-summer.

Just about every possible bird song or call can also be heard in June. The chorus is at its best at dawn. The exuberance of the various songsters usually peaks about 30 minutes before sunrise with a sometimes deafening climax. Some of the most forceful and energetic singers to get to know include the yellow warbler and swamp sparrow (wetland habitats); the ovenbird and red-eyed vireo (deciduous forests), the veery and black-throated green warbler (evergreen and mixed forests); the savannah sparrow and eastern meadowlark (fields and meadows); the eastern kingbird and grey catbird (brushy roadsides and open woodlands); the chimney swift and house sparrow (urban downtown); and the chipping sparrow and northern cardinal (suburban neighbourhoods).

As for our sense of sight, it is treated to more than 15 hours of daylight, more than at any other time of year. June days seem never-ending. At noon, the sun arches almost directly overhead, making for very short shadows.

Our taste buds, too, are regaled this month, because June usually means ripe strawberries.

This is also the month where the leaf and stalk parts of plants take centre stage. Be sure to enjoy the wonderful tastes of lettuce, spinach, rhubarb, and asparagus.

Finally, even our sense of touch is treated to something special. The fresh, immaculate June leaves are almost silk-like to the touch, and it's well worth your time just to stop to feel them.

The new growth on tamarack trees is especially smooth and delicate.

The events listed below represent a typical June nature almanac for the Kawarthas. However, many of the events occur over the entire month and are not restricted to any particular date.

1 — June is the time of peak nesting activity for many bird species, but especially for migrants from the tropics. This is definitely a time of year to try to keep your cat indoors.

2 — Fawns are born in late May

or early June. The white spots on the fawn's brown coat look like sunlight dappling the forest floor, affording excellent camouflage as the animal rests.

3 — Shorebirds such as least and semipalmated sandpipers are the last of the spring migrants to pass through. Unfortunately, we have very little shorebird habitat in the Kawarthas. Consider driving down to Presqu'île Provincial Park.

4 — The call of bullfrogs is another signature sound of the month. Their deep, garrumphing "jug-o-rum" calls are produced by males as they defend a small territory and do their best to attract a mate.

5 — Bats are often seen feeding on warm June evenings. A mysterious disease known as white-nose syndrome has killed tens of thousands of bats in the northeastern U.S. in recent months and could easily reach Canada. It drains the bats' fat reserves.

6 — The first monarch butterflies of the new year are usually seen sometime during the first half of June. They'll be looking for milkweeds on which to lay their eggs, so try to assure you have a patch of a dozen or so of these plants somewhere in your yard.

7 — Osprey eggs usually hatch during the first half of the month. Male ospreys are hardworking individuals who provide virtually all the fish for the family. The females remain at the nest for much of the summer.

8 — Two species of sunfish, the pumpkinseed and the bluegill, are spawning. The males can be easily seen guarding their shallow-water nests which are built in colonies. If a female should appear, you can sometimes see the courtship between the pair as they swim in a circular path, side by side, with their bellies touching.

9 — Watch for turtles laying their eggs in the sandy margins of roadsides and rail-trails. Remember to slow down when driving through turtle-crossing zones and, if safe, help the reptile across the road. Unfortunately, with so many raccoons and skunks now in the Kawarthas, very few turtle nests escape predation.

10 — Giant silk moths take wing in June. They include the cecropia, polyphemus, promethea, luna, and the small, but spectacular, Io moth. Silk moths are most active after 10 p.m. on warm, still nights. They are attracted to bright, white lights, often in locations near water.

11 — Orchids bloom this month. The first to flower are the yellow and the pink lady's slippers. By the third week of the month, the spectacular showy lady's slipper should also be in bloom. This latter species becomes more difficult to find with each passing year.

12 — That "bird" you hear trilling from high in a tree may actually be a grey treefrog. This common amphibian sings melodious, two-second bursts of bird-like trills. You can see treefrogs by following their trill with a flashlight. Despite its name, this species can also be primarily brown or even bright green.



The veery (above) is one of June's most forceful and energetic singers. Below, Giant silk moths, including promethea (below left) and cecropia take wing this month.

13 — It's interesting to watch the roadside flowers change over the course of the spring, summer and fall. By mid-June, ox-eye daisy, dame's-rocket, goat's-beard, bladder campion and yellow hawkweed are usually in bloom.

14 — Little brown and big brown bats give birth to a single baby, usually in mid to late June.

15 — Now is the time that we see the largest butterfly of the summer, the tiger swallowtail, flitting about our gardens and fields. The butterfly resembles a tiger in its yellow and black colouration and a swallow's tail in the shape of the wing extensions.

16 — That white fluff blowing around and collecting on lawns on warm June afternoons is actually airborne seeds of poplars, aspens and willows. The seeds are carried long distances on white, silky hairs.

17 — A mysterious yellow dust descends from the sky as the male flowers of pine trees release their pollen. The pollen grains are uniquely designed for wind pollination and actually contain two air bubbles.

18 — Five-lined skinks, Ontario's only lizard, mate in early June and are therefore more active and visible. They can sometimes be seen on the rocks near the Visitors Centre at Petroglyphs Provincial Park. Skinks are black with five light coloured stripes extending the length of the body.

19 — With 15.5 hours of sunlight today, try to savour these long, sweet days by thinking back to the snowy winter we've just been through!

20 — The summer stars have arrived. The three stars of the Summer Triangle, Vega, Deneb and Altair, can be seen low in the eastern sky soon after dark.



21 — The summer solstice occurs today. The sun will rise and set farther north than on any other day of the year. Take note of where on the horizon it rises and sets as seen from your home. Then, compare these locations to sunrise and sunset points in December. The difference is amazing.

22 — When the weather is dry enough, the first cut of hay will take place. Unfortunately, this often results in the deaths of baby birds such as bobolinks, meadowlarks, savannah sparrows and northern harriers, all of which nest in hay fields.

23 — Look high overhead for Arcturus, the star that heralded the arrival of spring. It is now the brightest star in the sky.

24 — Mosquitoes are usually at their most abundant in June. The carbon dioxide that warm-blooded animals give off is what primarily attracts them — females, that is. Males feed only on plant sap and nectar.

25 — The living lights of fireflies appear in late June. Actually a type of beetle, fireflies produce a heatless light in their abdomen by combining a chemical called luciferin with luciferase (an enzyme) and oxygen. The light brings males and females together.

26 — Orange hawkweed is in



bloom. It may have been brought here from Europe by herbal doctors. They believed that orange plants were good for eyesight.

27 — That frothy spit you see on the stems of grasses and flowers in June fields is produced by the nymph (immature form) of a small insect living on the stem — the spittlebug or frog hopper. The foamy bubbles provide a protective shelter. Be brave and try to find the insect inside.

28 — White and yellow water lilies bloom in late June. Until they've been pollinated, white water lily flowers are open only in the morning. After pollination, the flowers are pulled underwater where the seeds develop.

29 — Wild strawberries are now ripe. They are sweeter and much smaller than their tame cousins.

30 — The roadside parade of blooming plants now includes common milkweed, viper's-bugloss, white sweet clover, birdsfoot trefoil and chicory.

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