

## Nature in the Backyard - April 2020

In an effort to stem the spread of COVID-19, people around the Commonwealth are heeding the call to stay home. So this month we're going to highlight, not Nature in the Neighborhood -- but Nature *in the Backyard*. Even confined to the homefront, you and your family can still connect with nature by just walking out your back door. And there's no better time to do so than in the Spring when nature is waking up after a long winter snooze. The days are getting longer, the weather is warming. Trees are budding and flowers blooming. Rabbits are hopping and squirrels chasing each other around the trees. And the birds are happily back singing.



How many species of birds can you spy? Take out your field guide or download one of the many birdwatching apps, and start identifying birds. Check the bird feeder (if you have one), up in the trees, along fences and in bushes. Make a game of it, keep a record, take photos and, most of all, have fun. What other critters frequent your yard? Squirrels? Chipmunks? Rabbits? How about snakes, toads, or salamanders? (I've found all three in my non-so-rural yard). What's growing in your yard? Can you identify the trees, bushes and early spring flowers you see? Start a nature journal and document the flora's growth day-by-day. Or grab a sketch pad and "capture" nature. And how dirty can you get? Let the kids dig in the dirt and discover a whole world of bug life that exists right below their feet. There's lots of on-line ideas for exploring nature in your backyard but it's also rewarding to just sit outside and read to yourself or to your kids and watch nature unfold around you.

There's also lots you can do now to help support biodiversity. As you look around your yard consider what actions you can take. Start by letting those leaves rest for a bit longer as they provide important habitat for overwintering insects that are on the verge of emergence. Consider removing the invasive plants from your yard and keep your lights off at night to minimize light pollution that confuse birds as they migrate back north to join us this season.

### iNaturalist ... Do You?

The Swampscott Conservancy encourages you to share what you see in your yard by contributing your photos to our iNaturalist project. What's iNaturalist? It's one of the world's most popular nature apps and it helps you identify the plants and animals around you. You'll get connected with a community of over 400,000 scientists and naturalists who can help you learn more about nature. And kids love it!

This April honor Earth Day by documenting our local nature during the **City Nature Challenge (April 24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>)**. The City Nature Challenge is an international effort for people to find and document plants and animals in cities and towns across the globe. (Visit [citynaturechallenge.org](http://citynaturechallenge.org) for more info.) We encourage you to participate in this event and join your neighbors in documenting Swampscott's nature.

To get started, create a free account at [iNaturalist.org](http://inaturalist.org) or via the smartphone app. Then, upload your photos. If you don't know the name of the plant or animal or insect you're looking at, iNaturalist will give you suggestions on what it thinks it is. Within minutes or hours, other users will see your observation and will help to identify it.

Check out the **Swampscott Biodiversity Project** page to see what is being observed around town and learn more about getting involved:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/swampscott-biodiversity>.

One of the best parts of iNaturalist is that anyone can use it -- you don't need to be a scientist or a professional naturalist. *You* are a citizen scientist. And by recording and sharing your observations, you'll create research

quality data for scientists working to better understand and protect nature. If you've got young kids at home you might want to give "Seek by iNaturalist" a try.... It's like Pokemon Go for nature!

To deal with the anxiety and boredom we're all feeling as a result of this pandemic, we hope you'll spend some time exploring and documenting the nature in your own backyard. It may help you feel better both physically and mentally.

Stay safe.

Toni Bandrowicz, President  
Swampscott Conservancy

"There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature - the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter"

— *Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder*