

Jim Chatfield

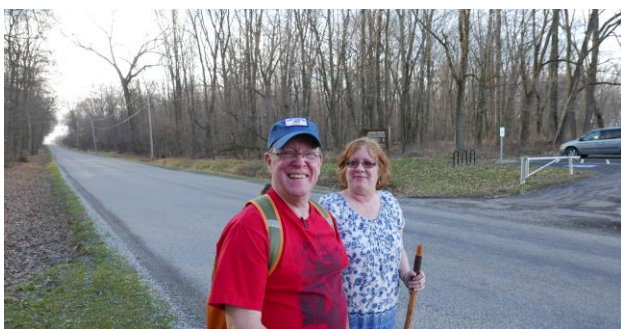
Ohio State University Extension

For: March 11, 2017

March came in like an ant-lion this year and weather continues its topsy-turvy spins with one of the coldest days of winter to come tonight. When you huddle and cuddle up with winter's waning chill this evening, remember when, back to the last days of February when record high temperatures ruled. Remember Friday, February 24 in fact: the day that I learned that "Peeps are not just for Easter".



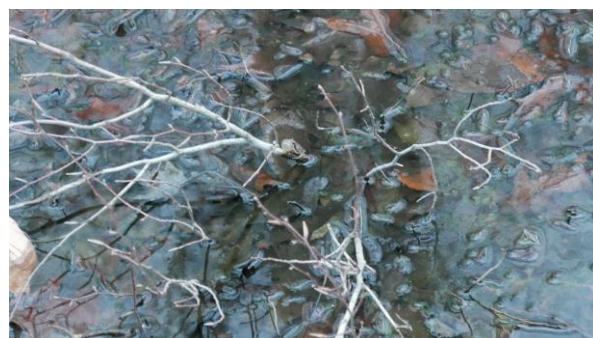
Spring beauty foliage and flower buds in late February 2017 (JC)



The Pied Peeper Greg Yukie and wife Dawn outside Johnson Woods (JC)

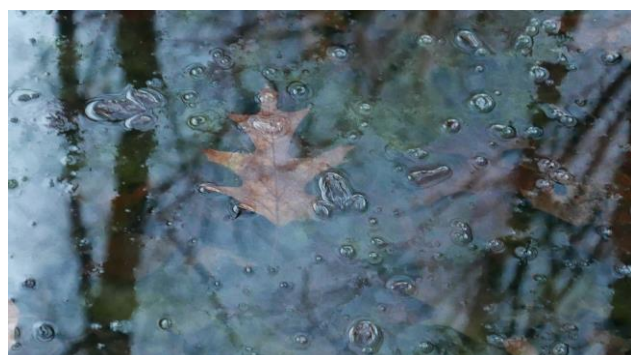
On Friday, February 24, my woodland-loving teacher wife Laura and friends, photographer Stephen Tomasko, book-man David Wiesenberg, and his book-daughter Julia headed out for a late afternoon walk to Johnson Woods Nature Preserve near Orrville. We hoped to find a February manifestation of spring beauties (*Claytonia virginica*) and such woodland sights. We in fact did find leaves and (in February!) flower-bud clusters of spring beauties, just peeping out through and above last year's leaf litter.

The real draw though, was the peep of a different piccolo: spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*). Before we even entered the Preserve, though, out came a jolly man and his wife, Greg and Dawn Yukie, still in the bloom of their recent whirlwind love at first website and subsequent marriage, with a tale of said peepers. As they passed by a known peeper water park, a pond about 1/8 of a mile in, amidst peepophonia, while he was on the boardwalk, he played a file from this phone and – voila – according to Greg, the peepers rippled and splashed toward him, still standing on the boardwalk. For me, Greg, forever is...



Spring peeper and its vocal sac expanded for peeping in late February (JC)

...The Pied Peeper.



Western chorus frogs just breaking the surface (JC)

For the more mundane part of the story, our little group, made our way into Johnson Woods. We enjoyed beech trunks with various bark patterns, tree leaves in various stages from last year, and then – the peepers, tiny chorus frogs. There was a pond of peeping from *Pseudacris crucifer* and another pond with some peepers but also, I think, western chorus frogs, *Pseudacris triseriata*. Instead of peeping, this frog's vocal stylings involve an almost squirrel-like clucking, likened by



Spring peeper (JC)



Spring peeper amidst leaves and water (JC)

what I call a Lennon-McCartney-esque “dragging of a comb across my (brittle, hairless) head.”

It was a wonderful scene and soundscape. It was in the 40s on that Friday evening. Then the low 70s (remember!) on Saturday. On Sunday, February 26, Laura and I returned to Johnson Woods in the late afternoon, with temperatures back to the 30s, and alas, the male peepers and their incredibly early phenological mating calls were, temporarily on hold, saving their wind for a later, warmer, day. Alas, with night temperatures last night and tonight

in the teens, like us, they shall be chilled, but shall return with the return soon of springlike weather.

Now, for another winter turning to spring phenomenon: student presentations in my Sustainable Landscaping class I teach on the OSU campus in Columbus. Phenomenal students all, so here are a few notes from their stylings. More to come in later Almanacs, but first up is Pete Grantham, who hails from right here in Akron.

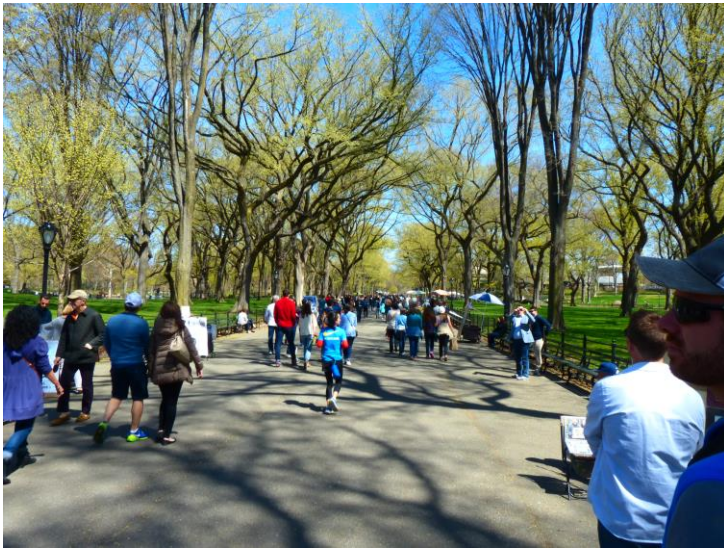
Pete chose “Central Park: An American Icon” for his presentation, appropriate since our class trip in early April will be to the Big Apple and we shall certainly trek into this wonderfully sustainable urban oasis. The design competition for this park for the people was won in 1858 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. A wonderful quirk of Pete’s presentation was that each of his Power Point slides were titled with song titles from the group Chicago: “Saturday In The park”, “Call on Me”, “Wishing You Were Here”, “Another Rainy Day”, “Hard Habit To Break”, “I Don’t Want Your Money”, “Nowadays”, “Bigger Than Elvis”, “You’re Not Alone”, “Lowdown”.

The titles made contextual sense, “Lowdown” included information on how to access more information, “I Don’t Want Your Money” is a reminder that the park is free for all, but why the Chicago song titles? Whazzup, Pete? There is method to it all: Olmsted and Vaux also designed the renowned Jackson Park in Chicago in 1873, then re-developed it, as those who have read “Devil in the White City” by Erik Larson know, for the World Colombian Exhibition in 1893, then reverted it back to parkland in 1895, among many other Chicago connections. Extra credit, Pete!



Central Park spring scene with elm flowers just beginning (JC)

Back to Central Park. After years in the planning, Olmsted and Vaux began their transformation of 750 roughshod acres in the center of Manhattan that became Central Park. Woodlands, water in ponds and lakes, baseball fields, ice skating, large open spaces, 18,500 yards of New Jersey topsoil brought in, tens of thousands of trees, shrubs and flowers planted: Central Park opened in 1873.



Central Park Elm Allee (JC)



Central Park grassland scene (JC)

Like the stock market, the Park has had its ups and downs over the years, falling into disrepair many times. It was also a home for 15,000 homeless in a Hooverville shantytown on the Great Lawn during the Great Depression. In 1980, following a downturn in park maintenance and safety, the Central Park Conservancy a “board of guardians” was born to “restore, manage, and enhance Central Park in partnership with the public.”

What a job they are doing. As Pete notes, today Central Park encompasses 843 acres, with 37.5 million visitors per year, with 270,000 managed plants, 150 acres of water, 236 acres of woodlands, 250 acres of lawns, the Elm Allee, the Sheep Meadow, and much more. As Pete would say, “It’s Only The Beginning”, as he enhanced the other student’s excitement for our trip. More student-based Almanac entries in the coming months. The future is bright.

To close: From Zach Love, author of the play “Central Park Song”

“Let the park live in you until it sings you a song.”