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## MORE SIGNS OF SPRING

**Earth Day is well placed in April, at least in the Northern Hemisphere, as Earth's splendor and annual rebirth is everywhere**

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### MILK BABIES - THE SECRET SIDE OF SPRING

by

Franny Bluhm, Naturalist at GRNA

Spring is a fast-exploding display which thrills us hour by hour with the new discoveries of wildflowers, frog songs, and leaf emergence.

But there is the dark, warm, and secret side of spring, which we will not see for a month or two, although it is happening now in the fields and woods and underground.



In late April, the mother rabbit is plucking fur from her chest to line the nest for her 6 or 7 babies to be born within 27 days. She will return at dawn and dusk to nurse the babies, standing over them, but she will never lay down in her nest. In two weeks, these babies will be on their own.



The mama porcupine, however, has been gestating her single baby for 7 months, and the porcupette is well developed when born between April and June with a full coat of soft quills. The quills will harden within an hour after birth, and the babies are able to climb trees with their moms the same day.

They may nurse for up to 4 months but start incorporating solid foods within the first week of life. They will be on their own by late fall. Each of the 30,000 pre-medicated quills on their bodies have 700-800 barbs to protect against predators. Each of the quills is self-medicated in case of accidental self-pricking.



Spring will bring our first view of young deer if we are lucky. The mother licks away all scent of the April or May birth, and she will daily hide the twin fawns in new and separate locations. She will return periodically to nurse them, perhaps move them to a new location, but she will never stay with them. Secrecy is their best defense. The twins will begin to choose their own bedding sites and be reunited in about a month. These dappled young will be weaned at 2 to 3 months but stay close to their mom for a year or two – young bucks for a year and does for two years.



There are some mammal cousins which are *altricial* – helpless and undeveloped at time of birth. Such is the bear or the chipmunk. The bear's birthing is timed to coincide with its semi-hibernation. The cubs are born helpless and blind and tiny (200 grams) in January or February and will nurse throughout the winter with their sleeping mother. Even though

bears mate in spring, the fertilized egg is not implanted in the uterus until later in the fall. Development is paused. At the time she prepares her den, her body will determine if she has enough fat reserves to complete the development of the embryo, the birth, and the nursing of the cubs. If not, the embryo gets absorbed back into her body and she will come out of hibernation with no cubs that spring.

The Eastern chipmunks also, although not a true hibernator, will give birth to about 6 blind, pink, hairless and helpless little kits or pups, the size of a jellybean. The English word "chipmunk" is taken from the Ojibway name for this smallest member of the squirrel family which runs down trees head-first, *adjidaumo*. They do not store up fat the way the bears do. They collect thousands of seeds which they store in their vast dens, 2 feet underground, with tunnels of 10



to 30 feet in length. They can collect up to 165 acorns in a day. During winter, their heart rate can drop from 350 beats per minute to 4! And their body temperature can go from 94 F down to 40 F, waking up occasionally to eat, stretch, and pee. They are solitary animals who mate in the spring and give birth in 30 days to 2 to 8 pups. The mother chipmunk is very protective. If one goes missing in the burrow she will search until she finds it. The pups will stay in the den with the mom for about 6 weeks. When they emerge from the burrow, they have only 2 weeks to get the hang of collecting seeds. By 8 weeks, they are on their own and expected to start gathering enough seeds for them to make it through the next winter.

Spring beauties and returning birds herald for us the new spring season in the first week of April, but we won't be seeing many of our mammal friends until late May or June if we are lucky.

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## PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON



**At GRNA, we love Earth Day so much we are celebrating it all week. Take a look at the variety of programs available in person and virtually, at different times of the day. We hope one or more of these fun activities fits into your schedule.**



### **Spring Bird Walk**

**Saturday, April 17, 9:00 am – 11:00 am**

**\$5 per person, must pre-register**

Take a guided spring bird walk to learn to ID birds by sight and sound and how to log observations online using the eBird web page or app.

Bring binoculars, or borrow some from the Grass River Center. [Click here](#) to register.



### **Fairy Day for Families**

**Sunday, April 18**

**No registration necessary**

The Grass River Center will be open from 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. The children's book *Do Fairies Bring the Spring?* will be

read aloud outside at 1:00 pm in preparation for a fairy themed craft and a trip to our Fairy Garden to get it ready for the fairies' spring return. Supplies will also be available to make paper bag kites to take home. Activities take place all day.



**Nature Trivia via zoom**

**Monday, April 19 at 7:00 pm**

**Registration required**

Teams of 2-6 players get ready to stretch your brain with several rounds of family-friendly trivia via Zoom. Don't worry if you are not a nature expert; questions will draw from other areas of knowledge - like movies and music - as well. You can either be physically in the same place as your teammates and all tune in on one screen or you can be in different places and we will put you into a breakout room together to play. [Click here](#) to register.



**Birds Quiz developed by third graders at Grayling Elementary**

**Tuesday, April 20**

Watch the GRNA Facebook page for a new Kahoot quiz. Test your nature knowledge as a family.



**Family Film Night at home**

**Wednesday, April 21 at 7:00 pm**

**Registration required**

GRNA will show the short film *The Arrowhead Traverse*, which was voted Best Kids Film at the 2019 Wild & Scenic Film Festival, via Zoom. After the screening there will be an online discussion of this film about a family crossing the arrowhead of Minnesota via bicycle, canoe, and on foot. [Click here](#) to register.



**GRNA's Big Sit**

**Thursday, April 22 – Earth Day, 6:00 am - 9:00 am**

**\$20 donation to GRNA's Earth Day of Giving**

**Must pre-register**

GRNA hosts the The Big Nature Sit. Staff and up to 10 registrants will head out before dawn and experience the Earth waking up! Each person will find a space on the boardwalk to sit quietly & observe the sights and sounds of nature coming to life. [Click here](#) for more information and to register.

**Owls and Frogs Dusk Walk**

**Friday, April 23, 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm**

**\$10 per person, must pre-register**



Take a dusky walk with a naturalist to listen for frogs and owls. Dusk is one of the best times to observe wildlife at GRNA. This in person program has limited attendance, so participants must register in advance. [Click here](#) to register.



**Plant Wildflowers at GRNA  
Saturday, April 24**

**No registration necessary**

The Grass River Center is open again from 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. To close out the week of activities, GRNA will have Michigan

wildflower seeds to plant along the entrance road. Bring the family out to walk the trails and help to beautify areas along the road.

**...and there is still more happening in April!**



**Blooms & Birds: Wildflower Walk**

**Every Tuesday beginning April 27, 10:00 am – noon**

**No registration necessary**

Go for a relaxing stroll on the trails with GRNA docents Julie Hurd and Phil Jarvi each week to find and identify the beautiful and unique wildflowers at Grass River. Along the way listen and look for the birds that call Grass River home. Every Tuesday at 10am.

**...before May begins!**



**Stream Monitoring Training**

**Saturday, May 1, 9:00 am - 11:30 am**

**Free – Pre-registration is required**

Twice each year, GRNA monitors several sites along the 3 major streams running through the natural area to assess the health of the waterways. Every year, new volunteers are trained to help collect this data and contribute to keeping GRNA's creeks healthy. If you're interested in learning how to collect this data, please pre-register by email to [Emily@grassriver.org](mailto:Emily@grassriver.org). Please note: masks must be worn inside the Grass River Center.

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# GRNA's First Ever Native Plant Sale

There are two parts to this sale.

Starting today you can pre-order flats (flats only) of native plants to be picked up the day of the in person sale on

**Friday June 4th, 3 pm to 6 pm**

Purchase additional single species quarts on a first-come, first-serve basis on this day.

[PRE-ORDER FLATS HERE](#)



**dockside**  
Torch Lake, Michigan  
6340 Old Torch Lake Dr, Bellaire

**SPRING FLING  
IS BACK**

Tuesday, May 4  
5:00 - 10:00 pm  
Dine in or order for take out.  
The Dockside is giving 50% of all proceeds to support GRNA.

**GRASS RIVER  
NATURAL AREA**

## NEW LOGO WEAR

Purchase a shirt for yourself or as a gift and GRNA benefits



Choose from any of the logos featured above printed on a variety of styles, colors, & sizes from youth to adult.

Order online by clicking on this box.

A portion of the sale comes back to GRNA as a donation.

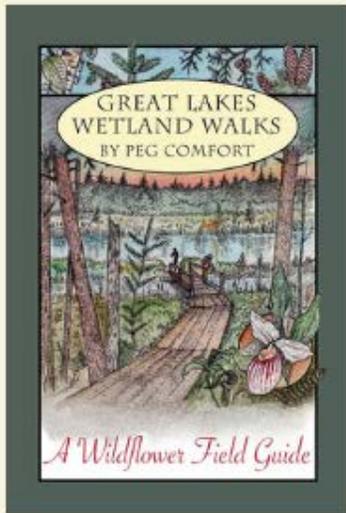
**The 2nd Edition of  
Grass River Natural Area's  
FIELD GUIDE  
to Northwest Michigan  
is now available.**



This guide is written and compiled by GRNA Education Director James Dake. It features several new and expanded sections and a new Foreword by Executive Director Jenn Wright.

Cost is \$18.87 plus tax

Order online by clicking on this box or available at the Grass River Center Gift Shop



**This beautiful and  
informative book  
is available online and in the  
Grass River Center Gift Shop.**

**It is perfect for hikers, gardeners, and  
nature enthusiasts.  
Artistic illustrations and photographs  
add to the book's appeal.**

[Click here to order](#)

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## CONSIDER A DONATION

Our financial well being is dependent on programming dollars and donations, and with the former sidelined for the most part at the moment, donations are of paramount importance. Your generous support is always greatly appreciated, but in these difficult days, your willingness to help us continue our mission with a personal donation promotes you to Nature Warrior status at GRNA.

Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-one years because of the generous support of people who value our mission "to manage the Grass River Natural Area, conserve and protect its watershed, and provide opportunities that increase knowledge, appreciation and community-wide stewardship of the natural environment".

If you believe in our mission and want to help us fulfill it for many years to come, please click on the Donate button below. Your support is greatly appreciated.

## DONATE



**Our mailing address is:**

PO Box 231  
Bellaire, MI 49615

**Natural area address:**

6500 Alden Highway, Bellaire MI 49615

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