



FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson
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Notes From The Field

The 2020 wildflower season has begun. The fiddleneck are up to 5 to 6 inches, pygmy-leaved lupine have their leaves, filaree have their true leaves and starting to flower, locoweed have their green leaves, grasses are up to 3 plus inches and yes there are poppy plants with their true leaves. I also observed the cotyledons of goldfields. The male Juniper trees are loaded with cones that are producing the pollen and the female trees have small berries.



Groundhog Day



Groundhog day is celebrated in the United States on February 2nd of each year and the most important groundhog is Punxsutawney Phil who lives in a burrow called Gobbler's Knob near Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. When the Germans began to immigrate to the United States, they celebrated Candlemas Day on February 2nd which was a custom predicting the length of winter by weather conditions and was associated with the triumph of spring over winter. The badger was the animal they used to help predict when spring would come. However, when they came to Pennsylvania they could not find badgers but a lot of groundhogs, so they adapted the New World species to fit the

lore. Groundhog day was established in 1886 and in 1889 the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club was established. If Punxsutawney Phil sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter; if he doesn't, it will be six weeks until spring. This year crowd's chanted "Phil" and the groundhog came out of the burrow and did not see his shadow. So it was announced that spring would come early this year. As for his accuracy in predicting spring, researchers state the groundhog has predicted the coming of spring only 39% of the time.

Fiddleneck

Amsinckia tessellate

Fiddleneck is also known as bristly fiddleneck and devil's lettuce and is part of the borage or forget-me-not family. Its flowering time is from March to May. It was named for Wilhelm Amsinck (1752-1831), tessellate means checkered, patterned like a mosaic referring to the seed. The plant is native to dry regions of western North America usually below 6,000 feet elevation. It is common in disturbed areas and deserts including the Mojave Desert and Sonoran Desert.

The cotyledons (seed leaves) are "Y" shaped, with tiny blisters and a few fine hairs. This bristly herb plants true leaves are lance shaped, hairy and are alternate to one another along the stem. The yellow flowers are small and tube-like with 5-petals that grow on a coiled stem. The name 'fiddleneck' comes from the way the opening flower head curls, resembling the neck of a violin. The plant can grow from 8 to 24 inches tall and the stalks produce hairs and when this plant becomes dry the hairs also become dry, are sharp, and can irritate human skin. At maturity, the flower produces four-lobed fruits that break into four one-seeded nutlets approximately 2.5 mm long and are dark gray with brown and black splotches.

These plants attract Painted Lady Butterflies and Alfalfa Looper Moths flying from flower to flower. Fiddlenecks can be toxic to livestock when ingested in quantity. Poisonings most often occur when livestock consume contaminated grain or feed. The leaves from immature stalks were bruised and eaten with salt by the Indians.



Cotyledons



True Leaves



Flower



Fiddleneck



Nutlets



M. Wilson



White-crowned Sparrow

Zonotrichia leucophrys

There are 35 types of sparrows in North America. To spot the white-crowned sparrow look at the top of the head for the black and white stripes. Adults are approximately 7 inches long, have the black and white stripes on their head, have a gray face, brown streaked upper parts and a long tail. The wings are brown with bars and the underparts are gray. The bill is pink or yellow.

They do migrate from the mountains to lowlands and will migrate at night. White-crowned sparrows like to winter in the southwest lowlands. I have observed these flocks of birds in February at the Prime Desert Woodlands. This bird is known for its natural alertness mechanism that allows it to stay awake for up to two weeks during migration.

They live in flocks and will rummage on the ground near brushy thickets and perching in the tops of bushes. They will hop and run on the ground to find seeds but will occasionally make short flights to catch insects in mid-air. They mainly eat seeds, other plant parts, berries, small fruits and insects. The young are fed mostly insects.

The female builds the nest in the morning. She finds a depression in the ground and builds it up with pieces of moss. Next, she builds the nest walls using grass, twigs, wood chips, pine needles. She then makes a lining of fine grasses, rootlets, and animal hair. The nest is typically concealed from above by leaves and visible from only one side. The finished nest is approximately 3-5.5 inches across with a cup 1-2.5 inches deep. White-throated Sparrows do not reuse their nests.

During the breeding season the males are aggressive, chasing each other off their territories. Later in the breeding season this aggressiveness declines, and by fall they form large flocks that forage together. Males are typically dominant over females. Pairs stay together for the summer, but birds often choose new partners the next year.

The female will lay 4 to 5 white to pale green, reddish brown spotted eggs. Incubation is by the female only for 11 to 14 days. Both parents feed the nestlings. The young will leave the nest about 7 to 12 days after hatching. The male may care for the fledglings while the female begins a second nesting attempt.

White-throated Sparrows are abundant, but declined over most of their range by about 35% between 1966 and 2014, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. In the U.S. they declined by 63% during that same time period.

NATIONAL BIRD-FEEDING MONTH



On February 23, 1994, John Porter (R-IL) proclaimed February as National Bird-Feeding Month when he read a resolution into the Congressional Record. Below is part of the formal resolution that he read.

“Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize February, one of the most difficult months in the United States for wild birds, as National Bird-Feeding Month. During this month, individuals are encouraged to provide food, water, and shelter to help wild birds survive. This assistance benefits the environment by supplementing the wild bird's natural diet of weed seeds and insects. Currently, one-third of the U.S. adult population feeds wild birds in their backyards...” He also stated that backyard feeding was entertaining, educational, and an inexpensive pastime enjoyed by children and adults. He felt feeding the birds was an excellent educational tool to learn about birds and a easy hobby to start.

Even though February borders springtime, it is still cold and the food can be scarce. Some birds will also be preparing for migration and will need the extra food for energy before their long trip. By placing bird feeders with seeds and water it could mean the difference between life and death for the birds.



To get started you don't have to go out and buy bird feeders or a birdbath. Start with a toilet paper roll, spread it with peanut butter, roll in bird seed, put a string through it and hang in a tree or on your patio. For water fill an old pie pan with water, add rocks to hold it down and give the birds something to stand on, then fill with water. Do change the water daily.

As you watch the birds come to the feeder and water you start noticing different birds and their markings and you wonder what they are—you are becoming a ‘birder’. You might purchase a bird book (called a field guide) to try and identify those birds. The next time you are at the pet store you go look at bird feeders and find out that there are many different kinds. The first feeder I bought was open with a platform for the birds to land on and I found out birds are smart. The pigeons came in and would land on top of the feeder and it would tilt and the bird seed would fall to the ground for them to eat. So next I bought a feeder in a cage so the small birds could go in and get the seeds and the large birds could not fit in or tilt it. Of course then I had to get a liquid feeder for the hummingbirds and a birdbath. I can now sit in my home and look out the window at the different birds that come to dine and in the spring I love watching the young fledglings trying to fly up to the feeders to eat.



Next you are aware of the birds along the trails when you go hiking or even walking in your neighborhood, binoculars may be something you need along with a journal to record the date and name of the birds you have spotted.

So John Porter, who claimed February as National Bird-Feeding Month was right—you help save the birds but you also find it is educational, the children and adults have a wonderful learning experience, and it is a great hobby.