

# Outlook on Lifestyle

## Tell-tale signs of spring in nature watch

As February gives way to March, winter-weary Canadians look for signs of spring. One early harbinger is the familiar robin, a mostly-migrant bird that moves into this area strongly in late March. It may surprise some people, however, that not all robins are migratory. A tiny population stays with us throughout the year. It is possible to locate this hardy thrush even in the dead of winter by seeking out their food sources.

The robins that serenade us on spring mornings are well fed on worms extracted from suburban lawns. In winter, of course, this regular robin fare is inaccessible. The few starling (or foolish) birds that remain, subsist almost wholly on berries. So, to find winter robins, look in the berry patch.

One area that almost always harbors a few winter robins can be found along the Credit Valley trail near the Upper Canada College property north of Norval. Here on the slopes of the valley a shrub called the Common Buckthorn grows in profusion. This shrub furnishes large numbers of sour purple-black berries that serve as an important winter food source for robins and other birds. Introduced from Europe.

### Backyard Naturalist

By DON SCALLEN  
Herald Special



years ago, the Common Buckthorn has proved to be a very successful immigrant. It is now naturalized across southern Ontario, its seed having been effectively dispersed in the droppings of birds that dine on its fruit.

A bird that the robin associates with through the winter, is the Cedar Waxwing. Waxwings are an exquisite tan-buff color, which is best appreciated up close. The congregations that frequent berry patches in winter offer excellent viewing. The Waxwing is much more inclined to tolerate our winters than is the robin. While one or two robins may be encountered on a winter's walk, scores of Cedar Waxwings can be found. The call of the Waxwing as described by Roger Tory Peterson, author of a "Field Guide to the Birds", is a "high thin lisp or yell". This oft-repeated call allows keen-eyed birders to home in on their ex-

act location.

Two other berry producing plants that help ensure the survival of winter birds in our area are the wild grape and the Winterberry shrub. Wild grapes are abundant throughout the valleys of the Credit River and Black Creek. The sweet fruit of this vine usually persists into winter and serves as food for a variety of birds including Robins, Waxwings and Cardinals. The Winterberry, a native species of deciduous holly, bears striking red fruit in the fall, that is irresistible to

winter-resident birds. Found in moist situations, this shrub is abundant in poorly drained land south of Acton, on the east side of Highway 25.

Spring Watch: Though many Crows stay with us during the winter, their numbers are now being swelled by returning migrants. Flocks of Horned Larks have returned. Favoring country roadsides for

weed seeds and grit, they can easily be observed from your car. Look for returning Grackles and Red-Winged Blackbirds over the coming week.

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★ ★ ★  
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## Sap's running

"Sap's running" were once magical words to the country boy and girl. It meant warm bright sunny days with melting snow and big puddles followed by cold freezing nights. Out would come the sap buckets made from staves, the spouts, fashioned during the long winter evenings from sumac stems, and the large iron cauldron kettle. All the necessary equipment (as well as many children as coaxed into the room) were loaded onto the stoneboat (or sleigh) and drawn by horse or oxen to the family sugar bush. The sap was collected in pails and usually with the help of the neck yoke brought to the kettle for "boiling or sugaring down". This was simply boiling away most of the water of the sap. Since it takes between 30 and 40 gallons of sap to make one (1) gallon of syrup you can imagine the amount of boiling this requires.

Sometimes a thin slice of pork fat was added to calm down the tawny steaming mass that always threatened to boil over. Also, this method produced its share of ashes and smoke that found its way into the pot and affected both the syrup's flavor and color.

"Sugaring off" meant pouring the boiled thick syrup hot upon the snow and making the most delicious of all sweets - "Maple wax". In another method, the hot syrup was stirred until it "grained" and maple sugar cakes were then made by pouring this into little tins.

No one knows exactly who first discovered how to make maple syrup from maple sap. The story begins with the Indians who lived along the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes. They collected the sap in birchbark containers and boiled it in log troughs, heated by hot stones.

Until after Confederation when cane sugar became available, the maple crop was the common source of sugar for the early settlers.

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**Tasty Recipes**  
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**BANANA CAKE**

Sift together:

- 2 1/4 c. sifted cake flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1/4 c. granulated sugar

Add:

- 2/3 c. soft shortening
- 2/3 c. sour milk

Beat for 2 minutes at medium speed with electric mixer.

Add 2 eggs, 1 cup mashed bananas. Beat 2 minutes more.

Bake in 9" pan at 350° for 45-50 minutes.

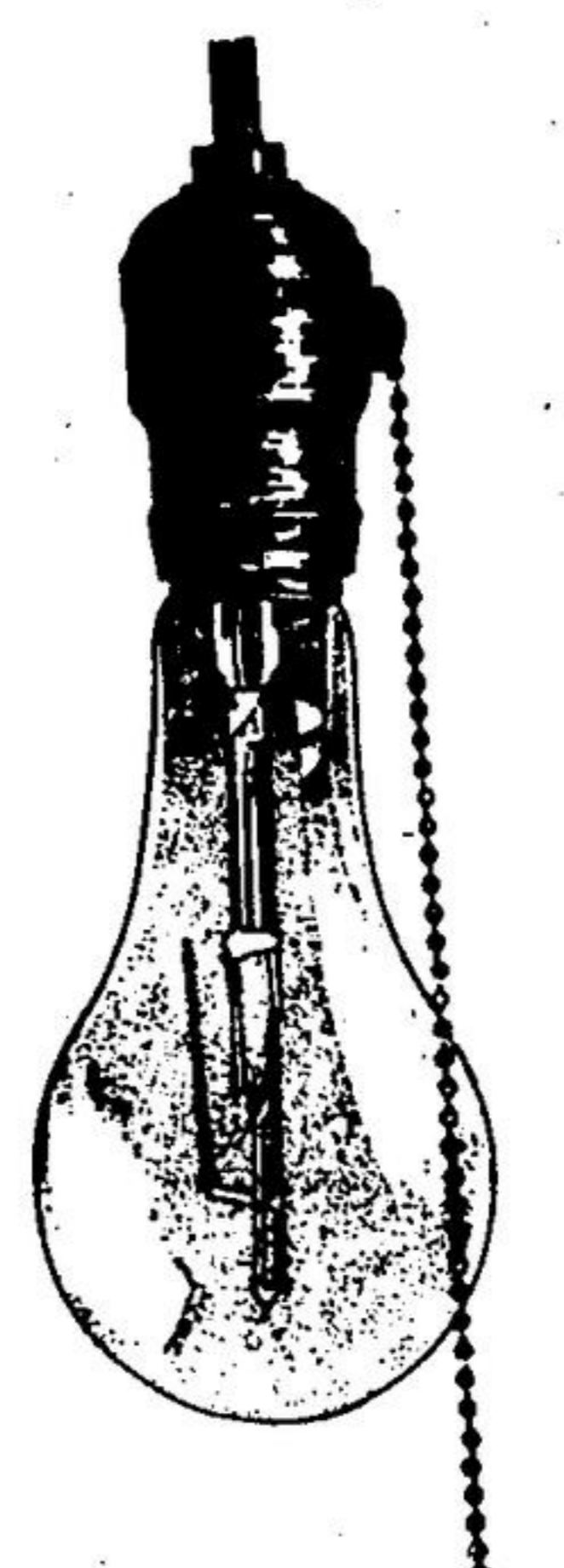
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