

What's happening in spring?



April always feels a little magical to us! The colder, darker days of winter come to an end and we have longer time periods of sunlight and warmer weather. So how do you think these lighter and warmer days will change how plants and animals behave? When plants or animals change their behavior or something physical about their bodies to better survive in their environment, this change is called an **adaptation!**

Animal adaptations

This winter (in January), we talked about three ways animals **adapt** their behavior to survive the cold weather – by migrating, hibernating, or by staying active all year. Animals might have changed something about their physical bodies like growing more fur to stay warm (you might notice that if you have a dog or cat at home!), by lowering their heart rate or how often they breathe when they hibernate, or even by changing color (birds often change their bright-colored feathers for not-so-bright colored feathers when they're not looking for a mate to be less obvious to predators).

In the spring, we see these adaptations reverse - now birds and mammals that migrated are returning and animals that hibernated are waking up again! Scientists think that the longer length of daylight is one of the most important cues that tells birds when it's time to migrate back to their spring and summer nesting grounds, as well as the warmer temperatures outside. For hibernating animals, it's not quite as simple – they rely more on an internal clock that tells them roughly how many days to stay asleep. When they hibernate beneath the ground, they don't notice the change in sunlight and can't feel the air temperature changing!

Plant adaptations

In the fall and winter, we talked about how plants adapt to colder weather and shorter days by losing their leaves to save energy and by spreading their seeds to ensure part of them will survive the cold. Now that the weather has become warmer and the days are longer, plants will once again grow leaves and flowers!

Look for little round or oval buds along the branches of shrubs or trees. These little buds will slowly open to become new leaves or parts of a flower, and parts of those flowers will become seeds again in the fall.



New life!

Besides adapting to changes in the season, what other important life activity happens for birds and mammals?

Spring is often the season for baby animals! In early spring, we see and hear animals seeking their mates. Look for Canada geese pairing up in the wetlands. Listen for the loud call of male red-winged blackbirds hoping to attract females in the marshes. (Look back at last month's bird guide for a reminder on what they sound like!) Listen for male frogs calling in the wetlands too! Each species of frog has a slightly different call that helps mates of the same species find each other.

After birds find their mates, they'll be looking for a place to nest! Some birds like to build nests in tree cavities created by woodpeckers or other animals, some build their nests out of sticks, grass, or mud, and others prefer to build nests on the ground...or even around the places we live! Some birds will return to the same nest each year, while others will build a new one every spring. Checkout some neat bird nest designs [here](#)!

Many mammals, like foxes and coyotes, have already found their mates in the winter and have dug dens to prepare for babies of their own. Sometime between March and May, these babies will be born. Baby mammals aren't seen as often as baby birds – they're most active in the early morning and late evening and their parents are extra careful to avoid people. Later in the spring, birds will lay eggs that will hatch into babies. If you find a baby bird outside of it's nest, click [here](#) to learn how you can decide if it needs help.

We hope you have a wonderful time welcoming in the spring season and celebrating lots of new life around us! Thanks for you help making our outdoor spaces a great place for people and wildlife!

