

Celebrate Earth Day by taking a walk in the Great Outdoors!

## NO STUDENT LEFT INSIDE

### SPRING SIGHTS & SOUNDS

Take a walk around your school to look and listen for signs of the arrival of spring. Students can use binoculars, and a journal to record what they observe, by drawing a picture, name of species if known, and writing a short description. If your school is near a wetland area, there will be numerous plants and animals to observe. Even if there is no wetland area nearby, there will be cues in nature signaling spring's arrival. Also, children can continue the exercise in their own neighborhood and share their observations with their classmates.

Birds are migrating—returning north to nest and find a mate. Males will have bright plumage now and many perform courtship displays to attract female birds. Before leaves are on the trees, you can more easily view returning birds through your binoculars. But the surest way to identify a bird is to learn some of the more common bird calls, and listen to distinguish calls as you walk quietly outdoors. A bird you can see and hear in urban areas is our State bird, the American robin. Other birds you may see include bluebirds, purple finches, red-winged blackbirds, kingfishers and numerous duck species.

The few mammals that are true hibernators are waking up, recovering from winter dormancy, and looking for food. Mammals are regaining weight by browsing on succulent buds, shoots and grasses, especially in sunlit areas where the snow melts first. You can look for tracks in the mud or snow if it's still on the ground. Common tracks are deer and squirrel, or you may see opossum or raccoon.

As the water warms and the air temperature rises, frogs can be heard calling to attract a mate as the water warms and the air temperature rises. Reptiles are emerging from hibernacula, basking in the sun on rocks, logs or roads! After they warm up and mate, they will move to summer grounds in fields or woods. Pond turtles can usually be spotted on partially submerged logs.

Plants have new shoots and leaves. Early wildflowers, hepatica, spring beauty, trout lily and others can be seen in wooded areas. Do you hear or see insects? They are mating and laying eggs, emerging from eggs, and larvae are shedding their skin to become adults.

Where do these animals? Many species of wildlife and plants need special conditions in the habitats where they live. In addition to your school yard and neighborhood, they live in woodlands and wetlands throughout the state of Michigan. Fortunately the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, MDNR, manages state lands including state parks and recreation areas, state forests and other lands, providing forests and wetlands for birds, amphibians and reptiles, mammals, fish, and many other species of wildlife and plants. Conservation and protection of wildlife habitat is an important mission of the DNR.

