

Sights and Sounds of Early Spring at Barrington Hills Farm



Deer seen yarding, a strategy they use to survive harsh winters by grouping in areas where there is food and cover from the wind.

FOR 40 YEARS NOW, the pond on the Northeast Corner of Barrington Hills Farm, toward the east end of Chapel Road in Barrington Hills, has been my go-to place to get my “prize winner” photo of the day. Not so much though during the winter months. I became stuck up there twice. I look forward to winter being over and the better weeks of March and April coming along.

The first things to show up at the pond in March are the male redwing blackbirds. Seems like all they do is sit in the cattails and sing and sing and sing their short chorus as they await their mates. The raucous Sandhill cranes will be back doing their mating jig before the year’s last snow has fallen. Mallards and Canadas practically never leave nor do crows, hawks, and owls.

My favorite, the colorful little wood duck and his petite mate, will be back. Weird sounding Pied-bill grebes will settle in on one or another of the farm ponds. A grebe chick can eat a frog almost half its size.

In early April, 100-plus swallows return and zip and dip across the pond’s surface ... they love gnats but relatively speaking, they don’t get many. Most of the swallows move on in a day or so. The gnats don’t.

The diminutive little bluebird will be back to search out a nesting site. The snow-white egrets are back in force as are the huge Great Blue Herons. Last year I witnessed three egrets stake out a Sandhill crane nest for the entire incubation period—the eggs hatched successfully, but the two baby colts disappeared within a week.

Turtles come up out of the muck and mud for the first time since probably early October. Frogs, frogs, and more frogs start to tune up in March. There will be “croakers” in the weeds all along the road’s edge.

Barrington Hills Farm’s approximate 700 acres were assembled as one farm some years ago; flowers, apple trees, a couple of silos and remains of original buildings from those farmsteads are still visible in a few places.

Spring flowers make their colorful appearance. Jonquils, blue belles, jack-in-the-pulpits, mayapples, and bloodroots frequent the woods.

The land between Chapel and Spring Creek Roads slopes down into a bowl shape and has offered some protection from harsh winter winds as do the dense woods. By March, the deer are back “yarding up” in that bowl. You can see 17 deer in my photo; four more are off camera. Bucks hang out in small herds of their own.

Deer are the most obvious of the farm’s wild “critters”. The deer in the photo are mostly young ones or does. They will stay together at least through March and April and possibly until the does start “fawning” in late spring. Good luck with that girls, as of this writing two coyotes are also in the “yarding area”. U

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Paul McFadden has lived in unincorporated Algonquin for nearly 50 years.

Barrington Hills Farm offers opportunities for his camera work with nature.

He may be reached at: Circa6936@gmail.com.



This award-winning photo shows winter before it slips into spring.



A wood duck.



For this swallow, it's hard to get in a word edgewise.



A Sandhill crane and egret assess each other for turf.



White jonquils are a sign of spring.



www.barringtonhillsfarm.org

Barrington Hills Farm is 700 acres of pristine, undeveloped land located at Haegers Bend and Spring Creek Roads in the northwestern most corner of Barrington Hills. The rarity of Barrington Hills lies in its open space, fresh air, clean water, and abundant wildlife. The land is precious and delicate and in constant need of stewardship to keep it that way.