

This Week in the Woods: First Week of June

JUNE: WEEK ONE



Crane fly



Dryad's saddle (pheasant back)



Tree swallow



Pink lady's slipper



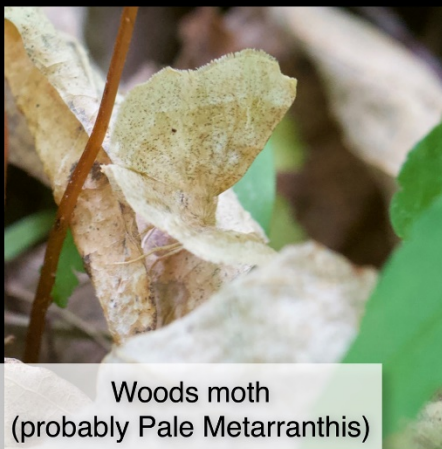
Starflower



Woodchuck



Oak apple wasp gall



Woods moth
(probably Pale Metarranthis)



Choke cherry

This week in the woods, we've noticed three different species of **crane fly** resting on leaves. At first glance, crane flies look like giant mosquitoes, but they're harmless. Here's [an article by Declan McCabe](#) discussing the crane fly family, including the life-enriching detail that "crane fly larvae tend to have distinctive 'facial' features on their rear ends."

If you're walking past dead hardwood trees, especially elms, keep an eye out for **dryad's saddle**, also called **pheasant's back polypore**. Supposedly, if you break apart this shelf fungus, it emits a pleasant, melon-y scent. Here's more about dryad's saddle from Ohio State University's "[Buckeye Yard and Garden onLine](#)."

Another common sight right now: **tree swallows**. Look for these iridescent, acrobatic fliers over fields, beaver ponds, and pretty much wherever there's a combination of flying bugs, open space and cavity trees for nesting. Tree swallows often inhabit bird houses. Here's [an essay by Kenrick Vezina](#) about the birds, including information on their early-to-arrive, early-to-go migratory habits.

Pink lady's slippers are starting to bloom. They're beautiful but, as [Susan Shea notes in this piece for *The Outside Story*](#), these orchids are also deceivers, temporarily trapping bumblebees in their blossoms for pollination, "but offering no nectar in return." To see this trick in action, [check out this YouTube video](#).

Starflowers are also in bloom. We've noticed them in a variety of different woods settings this week. Here's [a profile of this plant](#) from the U.S. Forest Service.

Woodchucks emerged from their burrows a couple months ago, but we're seeing them more frequently in yards and along stone walls, a favorite haunt. [Check out this species description by Susan Morse](#), and (especially if you have children to entertain) this [video describing how gardener Jeff Permar](#) learned to stop worrying about his tomatoes and love a garden thief named "Chunk."

We found an abundance of **oak apple wasp galls** this week under red oak trees. These speckled green orbs, a fun find for children, are actually misshapen leaves. A gall forms when a female wasp injects chemicals into a leaf bud, prompting it to grow into a ball that houses a single larva. Here's [an overview of wasp galls](#) in oak trees. And fun fact: old galls (which turn brittle and brown) were used in the Middle Ages as an ingredient for ink. This [video from The British Library](#) demonstrates the process.

Another common woods walking sight now: little brown **woods moths** fluttering up in front of your feet. Identifying individual species is profoundly difficult, but it's interesting to observe how many kinds you can find in just a few acres of woods. Here's [a link to an *Outdoor Radio* episode](#) from the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, in which hosts Kent McFarland and Sara Zahendra join JoAnn Russo for a backyard moth catching activity, and discuss the critical importance of these insects both as food for other wildlife and as pollinators.

Finally, we've been admiring blooming **choke cherry** (or chokecherry) out on the woods edges. The blossoms have faded in the last day or so, but here and there you can still find fresh flowers. Choke cherry is a common early colonizer of disturbed landscapes, and its fruits and buds are a valuable food source for wildlife. Here's [a description of the species](#) from the Macphail Woods Ecological Forestry Project, including a note of warning about its toxic leaves.

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