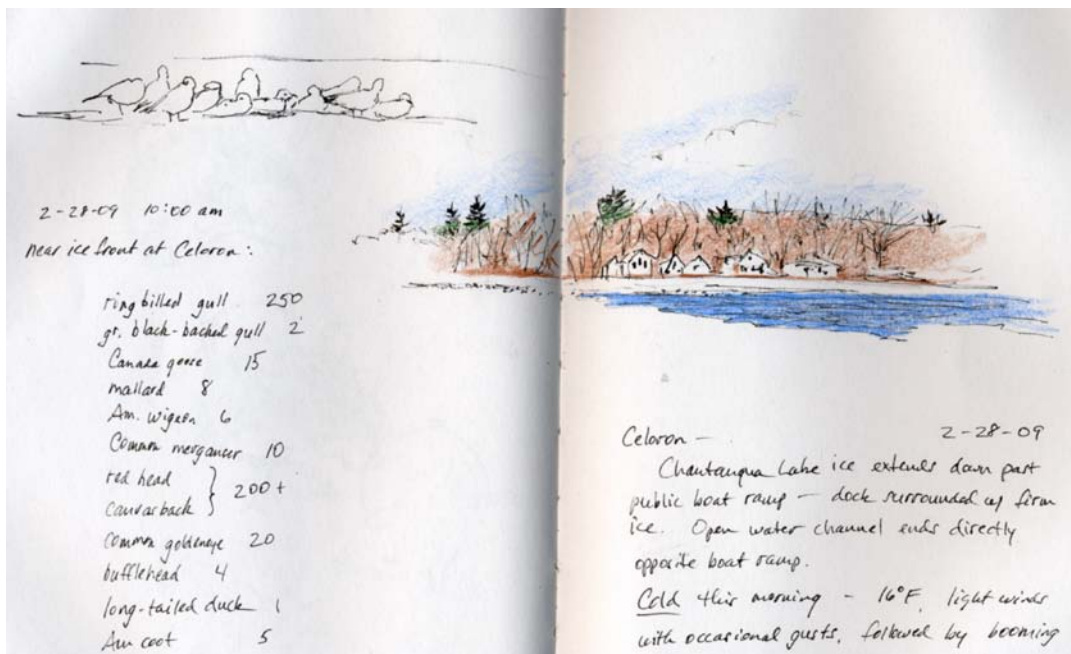


Chautauqua Watershed Notes  
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy  
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Signs of Spring

By Mark Baldwin

For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



Mark Baldwin's field notes from a recent visit to Celoron show ice cover extending into the Outlet and a list of waterfowl species seen. Despite this winter's harshness spring is definitely on its way!

Snowfall in the Chautauqua Watershed began in earnest in November, well over a month before the start of official winter. Snowfall totals to date are in the 180-inch range at its southern end (Jamestown) and in the 280-inch range at its northern end (Mayville). The temperature this morning (March 1) was 11 degrees Fahrenheit. Lake Erie remains completely frozen over. This winter has been long. Snowy. Cold.

And so, we wait expectantly for signs of spring. For the naturalist the waiting is not in vain because to sharp eyes the signs are everywhere in spite of the weather.

The Chautauqua Watershed is a critically important migration corridor for waterfowl, and spring migration is in full swing. A visit to the open waters fronting Chautauqua Lake's ice cover at Celoron and at other ice-free sections of the lake, will usually reward the observer with long, good looks at birds resting and feeding on their way to breeding grounds far to the north and west. Among those observed today were American wigeon, common merganser, redhead, canvasback, common goldeneye, bufflehead, and long-tailed duck.

Chautauqua Lake is an important flyway for tundra swan. One of my favorite signs of spring is the sound of distant swans in flight, their “wooo-wooo” calls higher pitched and somehow more stirring than the “honking” of a flock of geese. You may see a flock of swans resting in Chautauqua Lake’s water or on the ice any day this time of year.

To many folks, the quintessential sign of spring is to see male red-winged blackbirds and hear their “conk-a-ree!” song. I have not seen any yet but friends have told me they have. Robins and bluebirds are also early arrivals to look for.

American woodcock arrive on breeding grounds now too. If you venture near wet meadows you might hear a strange “bzzt” sound, perhaps followed by a crazy unearthly (and maybe frightening to the uninitiated) twittering as the male does his spectacular aerial courtship dance. The woodcock mating ritual goes on at dusk night after night in all kinds of weather.

The Chautauqua Watershed’s wetlands are sanctuaries for wildlife and are focal points for signs of spring. Spring peepers, tiny frogs that make a big noise, will start calling when the temperatures warm up (have faith, dear reader). Two other harbingers of spring, the wood frog and spotted salamander, will soon be putting on their show as well. Look for them around small woodland pools on the first warmer, wet nights of early spring. Wood frogs make a “quacking” mating call that does indeed sound more duck-like than frog-like. And you simply must experience the “march of the salamanders” at least once in your lifetime. It truly is breathtaking to see dozens, if not hundreds, of these huge black-and-yellow salamanders crawl through the wet rainy darkness to reach their ancestral ponds to mate and lay eggs.

We all need something to lift our spirits at this time of year. Do take time to treat yourself to the sights and sounds of spring awakening in the Chautauqua Watershed.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a local, private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization with the mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. CWC relies on membership donations to undertake its conservation activities. Its annual membership campaign is underway. For more information or to support these efforts call 664-2166 or go to [chautauquawatershed.org](http://chautauquawatershed.org).