Narcissus, Daffodils And Jonquils - True Signs Of Spring

The lovely intense colors of what are confusingly called daffodils, Narcissus and jonquils are one of the true signs of spring throughout most parts of the United States, Europe, Canada, North Africa and Asia. These bulb type spring plants are so beautiful in the garden but they are equally lovely growing beside the roads, in the woods and even in the middle of your lawn or pasture. Depending on where you live the flowers and plants may go by one of three or more names, but there are some differences. However, in a pinch, you can call any of these plants by the name of Narcissus and be technically and scientifically correct.

In reality Narcissus is the Latin name for the whole genus of these types of bulbs. They are in the Amaryllis family and are related to those beautiful winter flowering bulbs available over the Christmas season. Some Narcissus plants also bloom in the fall but they are not easy to find or common in most nurseries and gardening stores.

The Legend of Narcissus

The genus name is derived from a similar story in both Greek and Roman mythology. In most accounts Narcissus was a real ladies man but he was cruel and heartless to those that fell in love with his exceedingly good looks. There are several variations of the myth, but in the end Narcissus sees his own reflection in the water of a still pond and falls in love. In the Greek version he is unable to avert his gaze he slowly dies of hunger and starvation, cursed to be in love with the reflection in the pond without realizing it is himself. The Roman version as retold by Ovid has Narcissus realize that he is looking at his own reflection. He then kills himself because he believes he can never find anyone as perfect.

There are other versions as well but they all end up with Narcissus dead beside the pond, trapped on the spot by his own beautiful reflection. Where his body fell a flower was said to bloom the next spring and so it was named the Narcissus.

Characteristics Of The Narcissus Genus

All plants within the Narcissus family have similar characteristics. Most varieties have a single layer of six petals on each flower, all forming an open circle or perianth around a central corona. The corona can be disk, trumpet or bowl shaped and can be the same color as the petals or it can be darker. The flowers form a tube before attaching the stem which is solid and upright, keeping the flowers standing straight when in full bloom. New varieties offer double and even triple rows of petals for a very unique and striking appearance. Colors range from white petals with yellow to gold coronas to the uniform bright lemony yellow to darker gold colors. Leaves tend to be narrower and upright, dark green and form a dense green base for the flowers.

Narcissus

Typically when a gardener or florist uses the term Narcissus, they are referring to a specific species within the genus. This is scientifically known as Narcissus tazetta papyraceous or more commonly called the Paperwhite. They are very small, completely white flowers that bloom in the spring in small to large bunches. Paperwhites are delicate in appearance and have a beautiful scent, making them a terrific addition to spring floral arrangements.
From the Director:

Hello. My name is Peg and I’m a Gemini. I’ve always thought it was my Gemini nature that allowed, or almost forced, me to see both sides of issues. Sometimes I appreciate the duality this provides, other times it makes me feel like I can’t make up my mind. Should I really revel in our absolutely stunning March weather, or agonize over all the potential negative consequences?

I can’t seem to give up either the joy or the anxiety. But I can’t hold both emotions simultaneously, so I vacillate between them. When I’m up to my elbows in soil transplanting my asparagus bed, listening to the song of birds and frogs, life is good and I’m happy as a clam. As my dog and I take our early morning walk and I have on just light jacket, I find myself smiling just because it’s so pleasant out.

Later in the day, when my mid-March thermometer reads 76°, I get worried. How bad will the fleas, ticks, mosquitoes, and other insects be this year? Will invasive plants like garlic mustard use the early warmth as an opportunity to strengthen their hold and get a real jump on our native species? What about the potential loss of tree fruits? They will surely bud early this year, and if we get another frost, our regional apples, peaches, cherries, and other fruits will be history. Then there’s the whole issue of human illness. Will we have lots of sickness because bacteria and other disease-causing agents didn’t die back over the winter, or doesn’t that really happen anyway? Will our summer be really hot and dry, affecting everything from veggie gardens to difficulty sleeping?

I realize that the answers to many of my questions are currently unknowable. I understand that I can’t control any of this. I know I should develop a more accepting enjoy-the-moment attitude. Unfortunately, my six decades of mental habits are hard to break.

It’s Your Call Challenge

Springtime brings us lots of sounds that we don’t hear the rest of the year. Swans whistle as they fly overhead, peepers peep and wood frogs chortle in the wetlands. Barred owls mating calls range from their typical “Who cooks for you” to something that sounds (to me) more like laughing hyenas. Towhees tell us to drink our tea and warblers sing their little hearts out.

In honor of all that, I’m extending a challenge to everyone who’s a Pfeiffer Nature Center member, volunteer, hiker, etc. Come up with your own springtime “call” for the Nature Center. Your call won’t be auditory, instead it will be verbal. Actually, written.

Most animals have relatively short calls, so in keeping with that concept, you’re limited to a maximum of 43 characters, including spaces. Why 43? That’s how many characters are in our full name: Pfeiffer Nature Center and Foundation, Inc. You may want to think of it as a dramatically reduced tweet.

Send in as many calls as you’d like by April 30. Email your calls to me (peg@pfeiffernaturecenter.org), leave them on our answering machine (716-933-0187), send them to us on a postcard (PO Box 802, Portville, 14770). I’ll post all entries on our blog in early May. We’ll come up with a cool prize for the winner.

Here’s one to get you started – only 34 characters: Celebrate nature, share the wonder

Enjoying and worrying about the weather,

Peg Cherre

Seasonal Stirrings & Nature Notes

April ~ Birds do not learn from their parents how to build a nest; this skill comes instinctually. Each individual builds a nest almost exactly like those of the rest of its species.

When we look into the sky on spring nights, we are looking away from the center of our galaxy, the Milky Way. Therefore we see fewer stars, far beyond our galaxy.

May ~ Most pine species produce both male and female cones on the same tree. The pollen producing male cones are usually found only in spring and are significantly smaller than their female counterparts—generally no longer than an inch.

Early spring is the most difficult time of the year for squirrels and chipmunks, as most of their uneaten nuts are sprouting and other food sources have yet to emerge after the winter cold.

June ~ Young beavers leave their family units around the spring of their second year to make room for the arrival of newborn beavers in the months to follow.

Margaret Shulock lives in Friendship, NY. Her “Sticks” cartoons can be seen in the Olean Times Herald.
**Narcissus (con’t)**

(Continued from page 1)

**Daffodils**

Daffodils can also correctly be called Narcissus, but typically most people differentiate. Daffodil has come to signify the largest member of the genus and it is also the showiest. The flowers tend to be large and intensely colored, often with a darker corona than petals in cultivated varieties. The specific name for the daffodil is *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, and there are many different varieties.

Daffodils grow well in most soil conditions however the bulbs do need to be kept in a dry soil over the winter months to prevent rot. They will continue to develop more bulbs over time and they literally last forever in the garden in most parts of the United States. While they can tolerate cold in most climates they can also be brought inside then exposed to the cold in controlled settings to prompt spring blooming.

Daffodils will bloom for a significant amount of time depending on the specific plant variety. Some will bloom for several months while others bloom for a few weeks in the spring.

**Jonquils**

Often found growing wild in parts of the southern and western United States, the Jonquil, Narcissus jonquilla, is smaller and less showy than the cultivated daffodil. They tend to have more pointed petals, smaller flowers and flowers in groups from the bulb rather than a single flower stalk. The jonquil also has thin tubular leaves rather than the wider flat leaves of the daffodil.

Jonquils have a stronger scent than the daffodil and make great cut flowers. The jonquil can also be a cultivated variety and looks lovely combined with daffodils of different colors in a spring garden. Jonquils also are more adaptable to reproducing by seed than daffodils, allowing them to spread and expand their growing area quickly.

**What are the Farmer’s Signs of Spring?**

Up until the early 1900s, farmers relied heavily on observing nature for timing their crops. Without the daily weather forecasts from the Weather Channel®, farmers relied heavily on the observation of phenological signs in plants and nature to determine when it was time to plant crops.

Phenology is the scientific observation of natural signs and seeking trends in weather and soil conditions. Phenology is literally “the science of appearance”. The word phenology comes from the Greek words “phaino” (to show or appear) and “logos” (to study).

Changes in timing of phases of the plant life cycle, known as phenophases, are directly affected by temperature, rainfall, and day length.

Phenological observations have been used for centuries by farmers to maximize crop production. Farmers would be looking for the appearance of specific plants, insects, birds, and new leaves on trees.

**Flowers**

Depending on the area of the country, early-blooming flowers may appear as soon as the final days of February. Examples in the Northeast, Oregon and Utah include crocus (Crocus vernus) and snowdrops (Galanthus nivalis). Aconites come up early in U.S. Department of Agriculture Hardiness Zones 4 to 9, and Southern wildflowers that blossom early include winecups (Callirhoe involucrata) and scarlet sage (Salvia coccinea).

**Oak Leaves**

There’s an old farmers saying that you should plant corn after the oak leaves are bigger than a squirrel’s ear. The size of the oak leaf tells the farmer that the soil has warmed enough for corn. Other annual plants germinate best after this sign arrives.

**Grass**

While an enemy of many lawns, crabgrass heralds spring. This particular type of grass can’t germinate until the soil stays above 55 degrees Fahrenheit down to a depth of 4 inches. An alternative farmer’s sign is watching for forsythia blossoms. These require similar soil conditions.

**Insect Activity**

Insects grow and develop after the weather begins getting warmer because they’re cold-blooded. Monitor plants and watch for plant-feeders like tent caterpillars on crab apple trees. Their appearance means spring is just around the corner, if not already in swing.

**Other Plants**

A variety of other plants begin poking their heads through the soil to greet spring time sun. Farmers watch for early bloomers like ferns and garlic mustard. Skunk cabbage is another early appearing plant. (See our blog for more info on this plant.) With large showy green leaves, they defy winter’s grip because they create their own heat. Skunk cabbage sprouts often are the first plant in the woods to appear each spring poking up through the crusty snow.

**Birds**

Many believe that seeing a robin is an indication of spring’s arrival, unfortunately this is no longer true. Many robins spend the entire winter in northern states and never migrate south. Bluebirds are also considered another early arriver who signals spring. Even some bluebirds will spend the winter in northern states, especially if they have food and it is a mild winter. One bird to keep an eye out for is the arrival of red-wing black birds.

Even though you might not be a farmer one way that you can get involved in helping scientist record phenological observations is to become a citizen scientist and participate in Project Budburst. It is open to all ages and abilities and there is no cost to participate.
Beautiful Bluebirds

To me, birds are one of the best predictors of spring. A weather proverb states, “Bluebirds are a sign of spring; warm weather & gentle south breezes they bring,” & this appears to be true in the northern tier of the United States. Bluebirds do not come north until all chance of winter has passed & they are assured an ample food supply.

Conservation

Over 70 years ago, bluebirds were among the most common songbirds in America. The fate of the bluebird population in New York is an interesting example of how human land-use affects wildlife.

In early 1900s, the eastern bluebird was a common sight in the United States. It was found nesting on farms, in towns & even large cities. However, breeding populations were greatly affected by human settlement. Early settlers cleared the forests & they created tracts of open habitat, which the bluebirds preferred.

Population numbers began to fall in the 1920s as introduced species such as European starlings & house sparrows made available nest holes increasingly difficult for bluebirds to hold on to. As the century progressed there was the loss of small farms that contained woodlots, orchards, & hedgerows. Mega-farms were becoming the norm or farms were becoming housing developments. On the small farms that were left, there was an increase use of metal fence posts to replace wooden ones, which left fewer crevices for bluebirds to make their nests. The century also saw an increase in the use of pesticides, which limited the amount of food available for birds to eat & it poisoned the birds as well.

In the 1960s & 1970s, people started establishing bluebird trails & began other nest box campaigns. This began to alleviate much of the competition for housing crevices, especially after people began using nest boxes designed to keep out the larger European starling.

Bluebirds

Our state bird is about the size of a small thrush (6-8 inches) or about 2/3 the size of a robin. It has a big, rounded head, large eyes, & a plump body. Add its alert posture & you have a beautiful bird. Its wings are long but it has a short tail & its legs are fairly short as well. Its bill is short & straight which is good for catching insects, its favorite food. Males are a vivid, deep blue with a rusty or brick red throat & breast. Males can often look plain gray-brown from a distance. The bright blue color of the Bluebird always depends on the light. Females are more grayish above with bluish wings & tail. Their breast is a more subdued orange-brown. Females have a fairly distinct eye-ring. Young or newly fledged birds have a striking spotting or scaling on the breast & throat.

Habitat

The Eastern Bluebird is the most widespread of the blue bird species. Bluebirds are found across eastern North America & as far south as Nicaragua in South America. Bluebirds that live farther north or in the west of their range tend to lay more eggs than bluebirds found in eastern & southern parts. Most of New York’s bluebirds migrate to the southeastern United States, though some remain here in Western New York, particularly during mild winters.

Bluebirds enjoy living in meadows & other similar open areas that are surrounded by trees. They prefer open country around trees, but that contains little understory & sparse ground cover. This type of area offers suitable nest holes. Their original habitats probably included open, frequently burned pine savannas, beaver ponds, mature but open woods, & forest openings. With the proliferation of next boxes, bluebirds are now a common sight along roads, field edges, golf courses & other open areas. Today they are most commonly found along pastures, agricultural fields, suburban parks, backyard, & golf courses.

Bluebirds are cavity nesters. Natural cavities used by bluebirds include old woodpecker holes in dead pines or oak trees. They will nest up to 50 feet off the ground but prefer to be between 2-20 feet off the ground. Older birds are more likely than younger ones to nest in a nest box. Although individual birds often, switch their preferences between nesting attempts. Most bluebirds seem to prefer snugger boxes (4 inches instead of 6 inches on the bottom) with slightly larger entrance holes (1.75 inches rather than 1.4 inches diameter).

The boxes & tree cavities where birds nest are a hot commodity among birds that require holes for nesting. Male bluebirds will attack other species that they deem a threat. Other birds that are in competition with bluebirds for nesting cavities are house sparrows, European starlings, tree swallows, great crested flycatchers, Carolina chickadees, & brown nuthatches.

Food

Bluebirds perch on wires posts & low branches in open country & they scan the ground for prey. Bluebirds can spot prey from 60 feet or more away. They make short hovering flights to the

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Thank You to Our Volunteers

Our big winter event this year was the Snowshoe Blitz in January. Due to our lack luster winter, this event almost didn’t happen. Luckily we received about 4 inches of snow the day before the event & almost 50 people enjoyed a wonderful day out in the fresh fallen snow. Thanks to Paths, Peaks & Paddles & Colleen Kent for helping!

Thanks to Barbara Johnston & Vicki Schmit for helping with office work & Ovenbird mailings. Richard Ehman again helped us with folding Adopt-A-Tree brochures & letters so they could be sent to local schools.

Joe Leo led 2 Make & Take—Build a Bluebird House workshops. Our first workshop filled up quickly, so we added a 2nd, which also sold out. Everyone who attended had a wonderful time learning about bluebirds & building a house for our State bird.

Beautiful Bluebirds (con’t)

(Continued from page 4)

Beautiful Bluebirds (con’t)

(Continued from page 4)

Join us on Saturday, June 2, for the 6th annual Woods Walk & Trail Run. You don’t need to be a runner or a hiker to participate. In fact, slower walkers & those who choose our Guided Nature Walk are the ones who will likely appreciate our Living Museum the most. Our naturalist will share lots of interesting information about our environment, & our trail signs will point out even more. Enter online at www.WoodsWalk.net.

If you prefer a more leisurely activity, don’t miss Sunset at the Cabin on Tuesday, June 5. Trust me when I tell you there’s no better evening view than in front of our gorgeous cabin! We’ll provide some snacks & beverages, as well as a bit of historical information about the property, the Pfeiffer family, & the log cabin itself. There’s no cost to Pfeiffer Nature Center volunteers for this event; others pay a small fee. We also ask that you pre-register.

Stop by the I Love NY website to learn about the more than 125 participating museums, then plan local day trips, or longer travels, to visit several!

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Nesting
Bluebirds are the earliest nesting songbird & usually start around mid-March to early April. Males arrive first & begin the house hunting. They select several sites for a potential mate to check out. Males attract a female to his nest site by carrying material in & out of the hole, perching, & fluttering his wings. He shows the female several different sites & she chooses which one to build the nest in. The pair will bond & often remain a couple for several seasons. Some studies have suggested that around one in every four to five eggs involves a parent from outside the pair, usually a different female. Some bluebirds may switch mates during a breeding season to raise a second brood.

As the female builds the nest, the male will protect the territory. The males vying over territories will chase each other at high speed. Sometimes they grapple with their feet, pull feathers with their beaks, & hit each other with their wings. There may be several weeks between site selection & nest building, but it usually underway in

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In Memory of
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by nick vaczek

Gifts to the Kay Pfeiffer Gerkin Endowment Fund are maintained and managed separately from our operating funds. The principle in this fund is retained exclusively for investments and income generation, with only interest and dividends available to support our ongoing activities. Check with your financial or legal advisor to name Pfeiffer Nature Center in your estate planning.

Gifts may be made specifically to our sugar bush expansion project. We will plant sugar maples on our Eshelman property annually. While donors will not be able to identify “their” tree, they will have the benefit of knowing that their gifts provided a source of ongoing income.

Maple seedlings are $35 each.

Gifts of any size may be made to the Nature Center to honor or memorialize relatives, friends, or pets. With no minimum donation, this option provides giving opportunities for all.

We hope you’ll make a gift soon!

Pfeiffer Nature Center’s timber frame pavilion is the perfect spot for your wedding ceremony, graduation party, family picnic, or class reunion. It offers beautiful natural setting, marvelous views, great photo opportunities, and plenty of space.

Many dates are still available for summer & fall rentals. Visit our website or contact the office for information about pavilion rentals.

Pfeiffer Nature Center Mission

- To preserve the integrity of the old-growth forest
- To provide an area for scientific research
- To promote community-based nature study programs for grade school, high school, college and adult students
- To further natural resource stewardship

We are grateful for your generosity and support! Kind acts and thoughtful gifts such as these assist us in fulfilling our Mission. If we have inadvertently omitted your gift from these lists, please bring it to our attention and we will happily correct our oversight.

Create a Lasting Tribute

You can honor your family and friends in ways that will have lasting impacts on Pfeiffer Nature Center and therefore the local community. Gifts can be either memorials or tributes to the accomplishments of someone still with us, and all gifts will be acknowledged in this newsletter.
Yes, I’d Like to Become a Member of Pfeiffer Nature Center

Membership Levels and Benefits
All members receive a subscription to The Ovenbird, our quarterly newsletter, delivered to your home.

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May we contact you about volunteering? _____ Yes _____ No, thank you.

Send your completed form to: Pfeiffer Nature Center, PO Box 802 Portville, NY 14770

Beautiful Bluebirds (con’t)

(Continued from page 5)

early May. Building a nest takes five to six days. It is made by loosely weaving together grasses & pine needles & then lining with fine grasses & occasionally horsehair or turkey feathers. Females often build nests in each available hole but typically only use one of the nests. Bluebirds may use the same nest for multiple broods or go to a completely new site for their next brood.

A typical clutch size is two to seven eggs, though they typically lay four to five eggs. Bluebird eggs are pale blue. They are sometimes white but very rarely. If there is an egg of a different color than the rest in the nest, then that means a second female has laid an egg in the nest. This is known as egg dumpling. The clutch size tends to be smaller for younger females & for second broods of the breeding season.

Bluebirds will have one to three broods a year. The eggs are usually laid one to two days after nest is complete but some will wait a week. One egg is laid each day in the morning.

The incubation will take 11-19 days with a nestling period of 17-21 days. Females will start to incubate the eggs after last egg is laid.

After six days nestlings can regulate own body, tempera-

ture & female will leave the nest more often. When the chicks are first hatched, they are naked except for sparse tufts of dingy gray down. Their eyes are closed. Their clumsy & they eat two times an hour. Both the male & the female will take turns feeding the nestlings. In some cases, young from a previous brood will also help feed the new nestlings.

When the chicks reach fledging age, the parents will encourage the fledglings to leave by limiting food & calling to them from a short distance. Most young bluebirds are capable of flying 50-100 feet on their first attempt. After the young leave the nest, they are still dependent on their parents for food & protection for 3-4 weeks. The father will continue to feed fledglings while the mother re-nests. Bluebirds have close family ties & will remain close to parents throughout the summer & early fall. Young from later nests frequently stay with their parents over the winter. Adults tend to return to the same breeding territory year after year but only a small percentage, 3-5%, of young birds return to the natal area to breed.

Bluebirds are beautiful birds & I hope that you have a chance to see some this year.
JOIN US FOR BOUNTIFUL BUTTERFLIES!

Looking for a fun and educational way to spend some time outdoors? Then join us for our workshop on butterflies. Join Pfeiffer Nature Center as we host John MacRoy and his butterfly collection. Come to view John’s educational slideshow on butterflies and have a chance to see butterflies from around the world close up. John will be displaying his butterfly collection and will be sharing his knowledge of these wonderful creatures.

This event is geared towards elementary and middle school students but will be enjoyable for adults as well. Bountiful Butterflies will be held Saturday, May 19 at the Lillibridge property. It will start at 10:30 am and will run until 12:30 pm.

Please contact Pfeiffer Nature Center to get involved. Call (716) 933-0187 or email naturalist@pfeiffernaturecenter.org to register. The deadline for registration is May 17. The cost of this workshop is $5 for PNC members, and $10 for non-members.