

## **ICE MELTS AS PONDS READY FOR NEW SEASON OF WONDER**

**04/04/00**

Last week I wrote about our pond and how much we all enjoy it. I touched on its evolution and whether it's a pond or a swamp. The definition of each is so similar it matters not one whit, the simple fact is we enjoy it.

The family sees it on a daily basis and seldom sees the same sight twice. Each day of the four seasons presents a different face.

Winter perhaps is least interesting, cloaked as it is in its protective mantle of ice and snow. Its surface is constantly altered by the vagaries of weather and oft times tells us of the passing of wildlife neighbors.

It may be the tracks of wild coyote or fox, ever pressed by hunger, searching for a snowshoe hare or a neighbor's cat. Late spring annually announce the mating quests of the mink or his cousins, the weasel or fisher. The few times it is covered with hard smooth ice you can count on the grandchildren cavorting on it.

The ice is just now disappearing under the onslaught of the renewed power of the March sun, and the secrets that have been hidden all winter are beginning to reveal themselves. Signs of the muskrat's winter foraging are evidenced by the channels made in the bottom from den to feeding areas. If they were lucky enough to survive on the sparse plant life available to them and the hungry mink, their telltale droppings can be seen on floating logs and bogs. The skim ice of spring and fall traps air bubbles released from animal's fur and breath as they traverse their boundaries – signs that all water animals leave.

Peepers are the surest sign spring is finally here. The pussy willow buds are one last harbinger, followed by daughter Lisa seen harvesting the buds to decorate the house.

As spring turns to summer's longer days and warmth, the peepers give way to the chug-a-room of the bullfrog. The cattails and iris appear with various other water plants to cover most of the surface. Snapping turtles search the bank for places to lay their eggs. They along with frogs, tadpoles, newts and countless other denizens prove irresistible to the grandsons and their buddies. A constant daily cycle of capture, examine and release begins, along with wet, muddy clothing and shoes.

Older granddaughter Cyndi went through much the same routine but not with the same zest and enthusiasm as the boys. Most of her experiences were a result of waiting for the bus

where she easily sees most of the pond's surface. The great blue heron, ducks and snapping turtles were the most impressive observations. The most unusual was a pair of baby otters that were raised there. If we were quiet and careful, they could be watched as they played and explored their world.

Wildlife became more abundant and varied when flooding expanded the pond's scope. Their arrivals are easily understood and explained, but not so for the several new species of plant life. The most welcome and engaging new arrivals are the cattails and iris.

Since no bog or swamp would be complete without pitcher plants, I helped nature with their arrival. To date I have had limited success with a sustaining population due, I suspect, to fluctuations in water levels.

Fall is both the most beautiful and anxious time as each new day announces a step closer to that time most of us older citizens of the north country care less and less for with each passing year. The beauty of the fall colors are nature's reward and a sign that portends a period of hibernation for most living things, including myself to some extent. Morbid thoughts far from mind when all the signs point to a most welcome respite and the possibility of even greater joys from the pond at the present time.

I invite one and all to join us in viewing the sights and sounds of our pond. Take a left on Scusa Road just before Singing Waters and it's up on your left a short distance up the road. You can enjoy it from car window or road shoulder without even getting your feet wet. Bring your camera, you may see something worth photographing. See for yourself and help me decide if it really is a pond or swamp.