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Raven Hill Discovery Center, incorporated in 1991, is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation.

Mission: Raven Hill provides a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong learning for all ages by connecting science, history & the arts.

To: Friends and Family everywhere
From: Cheri and Raven Hill
Date: March 20, 2021
Re: Weekly Update

Happy Vernal Equinox, Everyone!

Signs of spring are everywhere at Raven Hill with more to come over the next few months! The obelisk in the ancient world says spring begins today, Saturday, March 20 as of 5:37 this morning! If you haven't been to the obelisk at Raven Hill, it's worth checking out on a sunny day. There are bricks that show the date and time, for each month of the year. When the sun is shining, you can triangulate the date and time to within about 15 minutes!

The Vernal Equinox signals the beginning of spring. At that moment in time, the sun again crosses the equator, making the night and day almost the same length. In fact, the word **equinox** comes from Latin. It means "equal night".

Vernal means spring, so the **Vernal Equinox** is celebrated as a time of new beginnings. I visited the obelisk in the Ancient World Saturday to celebrate the **Vernal Equinox** at our ancient calendar site.



(Above) Raven Hill's obelisk tells the date & time. Ancient obelisks were built to honor Ra, the sun-god, but the Egyptian pharaohs and scribes **also** used their obelisks as calendars and sundials. Being able to predict the future made them look all-powerful to the commoners.

(Left) Close-up of the obelisk shadow today, March 20th at noon. I'll take another picture tomorrow on the 21st and note the change!



There are other signs of spring and new beginnings at the Center. The rhododendron buds have started to swell and in early June will sport deep red blossoms.

(Left) Rhododendron are native to areas from North America to Europe, Russia, and Asia, and from Greenland to Australia. The "rose tree" is related to our blueberries and cranberries.



Just cut some forsythia branches and add water for your indoor enjoyment.

Another harbinger of spring are the animals “waking up”. By mid-April dragonflies and damselflies will be evident

around Raven Hill’s pond. The frogs at the pond will fill the air with their croaks and peeps! Red-winged blackbirds will try to distract you, if you get too close to their nests. Other bird species, including robins, chickadees and cardinals, will show their colors and spread their songs through the air.

The forsythia won’t show color outside until mid-May, but it is easily “forced” to bloom early indoors. I remember my mother cutting forsythia every spring. It is a welcome spot of color this time of year **and** again, when it blooms outdoors on its own!



The impressive row of forsythia bushes by the Schoolhouse all come from one original bush planted by the Center’s kitchen door. Want a start for your house? Just ask!



Damselflies, like this one, rest with their wings up. Dragonflies do not have hinges to fold their wings together, so they rest with their wings flat. Visit Raven Hill’s pond to observe the insects. Walk thru the Center’s Jurassic Park to see a sculpture of a giant dragonfly that lived 300 million years ago.



You can help track frog & toad population trends in Michigan by listening for their calls between April and July. Email DNR-FrogSurvey@Michigan.gov for more information, with any questions you might have or with your survey route. You can even include Raven Hill Pond on your route!



Cardinals are a favorite visitor here at Raven Hill. They make a real statement with their flashy red coloration. Cardinals are symbolic of family, because they take such good care of their young. What are some of your favorite backyard birds to listen to or watch?

This week, I took time to look back through more than a year of these weekly updates. On April 23, 2020, I wrote, “It is hard to believe that it is only April of 2020 and we are already focused on April of 2021 and making plans for better times then.” May those better times come with this 2021 spring season. Do your part to make that happen. Get vaccinated, continue to wash your hands, wear your mask, socially distance & stay away from crowds. Take care of yourselves and each other. We look forward to seeing you at Raven Hill soon!

If you know someone who might like to receive weekly updates, please send their email addresses to info@miravenhill.org. I will add their names to our list. If you are interested in previous updates, you can find them all on our website—www.MiRavenHill.org

Cheri