

APRIL 2020

To stop the spread of COVID-19, many events have been cancelled, but thankfully we can still visit our beautiful parks.

Wildflowers are blooming:

Eloise Butler Wildflower Sanctuary

(https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/parks_destinations/gardens_bird_sanctuaries/eloise_butler_wild_flower_garden_and_bird_sanctuary/) to see bloodroot, trillium, and trout lilies, to name a few. The Minnesota state flower may also be in bloom

Great Blue Herons - The great blue heron will lay 2-7 pale blue eggs. Incubation period may last anywhere from 26-30 days. **The great blue heron** is the largest heron native to North America, with a wing span of about seven feet. It is present along the Mississippi in our area from March to November. In March, this fascinating bird will return to colonies to rebuilt nests and mate after forming "bond-pairs." The nests are easy to spot as they're built at the top of the trees. After the tornado of 2011 destroyed their nesting grounds in north Minneapolis, they established a new colony on another wooded island just upstream from Marshall Terrace Park (2740 Marshall St. NE, Minneapolis) https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/parks_destinations/parks_lakes/marshall_terrace_park/#group_1_16007 . Other displaced herons joined a pre-existing colony upriver at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park <https://www.threeriversparcs.org/location/coon-rapids-dam-regional-park>. There is another at Pig's Eye Lake in St. Paul, but it is closed to visitation during the nesting season to prevent disturbance to chicks and nesting adults.

Farther Afield

More great places to photograph wild flowers:

Riverbend Nature Center (<https://www.exploreminnesota.com/things-to-do/3045/river-bend-nature-center>) just east of downtown Faribault off of Hwy 60.

Cannon River Wilderness Area (<https://www.co.rice.mn.us/Facilities/Facility/Details/Cannon-River-Wilderness-Area-4>), 850 acres of wooded river valley four miles north of Faribault.

Nerstrand Big Woods State Park near Northfield is about 1 hour and 15 minutes south and boasts a lovely waterfall (https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00241#homepage)

Sakatah State Park (https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00256#homepage) near Waterville, MN is about an hour and a half south of the Twin Cities.

Forestville State Park (https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00148#homepage) near Preston, MN, a little over two hours south, also has tours of Mystery Cave.

Beaver Creek State Park

https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00112#homepage), is a little over three hours from the Twin Cities near Caledonia, MN.

Seven-mile Creek County Park (<http://www.co.nicollet.mn.us/349/Parks-Trails>) near Mankato is also home to Minnemishinona Falls with a scenic overlook on the Judson Bottom Road.

Whitewater State Park (https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00280#homepage) north of St. Charles is about a two hour drive. This park has rugged hiking trails to scenic bluffland.

Also visit any SNAs in the area. This is a good time to see lady slippers in bog areas.

Prairie chickens begin their bizarre courtship dance at Bluestem Prairie SNA

(<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snass/detail.html?id=sna00996#maps>), about a three hour drive north west of the Cities. This site has no maintained trails. You'll need a blind to photograph the birds, which can be reserved through The Nature Conservancy Bluestem Prairie Office. This site is in an Audubon Important Bird Area and Watchable Wildlife Viewing Area