

## A Comeback for the Ages

If you ever found yourself at Taft during the winter months the past few years, you may recall gazing up at the majestic form of a Bald Eagle soaring above campus. But why we are graced with the presence of these animals only three or four months out of the year? What you may not realize is that we are, in fact, incredibly lucky to see any eagles here at all. The bald eagle has been on the endangered species list since 1978, and nearly disappeared in Illinois. This was largely due to the contamination of their food sources from pesticides, along with mass shootings and habitat loss.

The pesticide DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) is a chemical that was used heavily in the 1960's to prevent the spread of disease passed on from mosquitoes. Problems arose when insects became resistant to the chemical and it was found to be toxic to fish. Because DDT is difficult to break down, it is instead stored in the fatty tissues of organisms and can harbor there for years. Bald eagles consumed the contaminated fish and in turn, the DDT in the fish. This process of increasing concentration of toxins is known as bioaccumulation. DDT caused the eagle's eggs to become brittle and break easily during incubation. This was one



of the main causes in the decline of the Bald Eagle. DDT was banned in the United States in 1973. But even now communities are trying to restore the use of DDT because of the increasing occurrence of West Nile disease. The ban of DDT and an awareness that bald eagle habitat needed to be preserved were key factors in the comeback of the bald eagle.

In recent years bald eagles have become increasingly present in Illinois. The eagles we see are northern eagles that migrate south from Canada and the Great Lakes States. They prefer areas near large bodies of water where fish are plentiful and tall trees for roosting are available. The first eagles usually arrive around late November and leave sometime in March to return to their nesting grounds in the north. During their stay in the area it is not uncommon to see large groups of eagles in trees near open water. This is especially unusual based on their normally aggressive attitude towards territory. If an eagle chooses a nesting site it will stay there and not migrate back north. Today in Illinois there are about 40 active nest sites, compared to six in 1990. Because of the increase of nesting pairs around the country the bald eagle has been upgraded from endangered to threatened.

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## Campus Improvements

The old red shed behind the Seven Muses statue will soon be gone! After 35 years, Lorado Taft Field Campus will be replacing the waste water treatment plant this summer. The new plant will be able to handle the varying amount of use the campus receives, while the old plant relied on consistent usage, much like the treatment plant in a city or town. The new plant will be located near the existing plant, and the tanks of the old plant will be used as overflow storage as required by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. Northern Illinois University is not providing any financial support for this project, and it will take us several years to pay for it. However, this is one of those projects that is necessary for Taft Campus operations, and it will benefit us for many years to come.



The current water treatment plant

## April Showers Bring Spring Wildflowers

The sun is shining, the days are getting longer, and the snow has finally said its goodbye's. Spring has finally come and the forest has changed from a dull brown to a flourish of greens, pinks, and whites as the spring wildflowers have started to bloom. If you find yourself walking in the woods in the next few weeks, make sure you keep an eye out for these unique spring wildflowers.

Depending on the weather, the earliest spring flowers will usually start blooming in mid to late March. One of first is Hepatica. Its six pink, white, or purple petals and hairy stem can easily be identified. This plant will not grow new leaves until the flowers have disappeared, but the leaves from last year can still be seen. They are a leathery, dark green with three lobes. Another flower that usually starts blooming in late March has eight white petals, and only one leaf, which, before it opens, is wrapped around the stem of the flower. The flower itself is very short lived; sometimes only lasting a week or two, but the leaf will continue to grow until mid summer. This plant also has red sap, which is how it came to be called blood-root. Dutchman's Breeches will usually start blooming in late March as well. This is a very unusual flower- it has white or pink petals that actually look like a pair of breeches hanging upside down from a stalk. Their leaves are frilly and almost fernlike.

As these first few species of wildflowers start to lose their petals, another wave of wildflowers will begin to take over the forest floor. During April and early May, the Trout Lilies, May apples, Trilliums, and Jack in the Pulpits will start flourishing. Trout Lilies are usually easy to spot, as they grow in large colonies on the forest floor. They have a yellow or white flower nodding on a lone stalk, while the green and brown mottled leaves literally look like fish trying to jump out of the soil. The May apples are another wildflower that is hard to miss-their leaves open up to look like miniature green umbrellas. Their flowers are white, which bloom between the gigantic leaves. Eventually, this flower will produce a small, round, green apple like fruit.



Dutchman's Breeches

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# Comeback Continued

The danger of bioaccumulation does not just affect the bald eagle. Today, increasing amounts of pesticides are used because of insect resistance. These chemicals build up in the insects and when birds, fish or other animals feed, it can be potentially fatal. As spring and summer come around, so does the planting season for farmers, and with it, the use of pesticides. Although we have seen the amazing comeback of the bald eagle, not all birds have the benefit of the bald eagles' popularity, and may be overlooked. It is imperative for us to realize the potentially detrimental affect we can have on the well being of our bird and animal species, and it is our responsibility to attempt to preserve and enrich their lives. So the next time you look to the skies at Taft and see the incredible figure of the bald eagle circling, remember the hardships they overcame, and those that other species still face.

<http://www.greatriverroad.com/Eagles/eagleCover.htm>  
<http://www.illinoisraptorcenter.org>  
<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/i/b/msab0h.html>



## Wildflower Bloom Calendar

Woodland Wildflower	Estimated Bloom
Wild Columbine	April-July
Jack-in-the-pulpit	April-June
Wild Ginger	April-May
Dutchman's Breeches	April-May
Virginia Bluebells	April-May
Woodland Phlox	April-May
Solomon's Seal	May-June
Bloodroot	March-April
May Apple	March-May
Wild Geranium	April-June
False Solomon's Seal	May-July
Merrybells	April-June
Trillium	April-June
Hepatica	March-June

## Wildflowers continued

Trilliums also begin to bloom in April as well. Depending on the species, the flowers could be red, pink, or white, but they will always have three petals, and there will always be a whorl of three leaves on the stem. The Jack in the Pulpit is not as easy to find. Like the trilliums, it also has three leaves, but the green flower is on a different stalk and tends to hide under the leaves.

These spring ephemerals, among many others, can only be seen for a very short period of time. By the time June rolls around, many of these wildflowers will have completely disappeared. The trees leaf out, preventing sunlight from reaching the forest floor, starving the wildflowers of the light they need to grow. So, go outside, into the woods, and make sure you have a chance to see these unique flowers before they disappear for the season.



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## Zero Food Waste Hall Of Fame.

- 🏆 Leland Elementary
- 🏆 Galena Middle
- 🏆 Washington Gifted School
- 🏆 Metro Prep
- 🏆 Thomas Middle

Everyone who comes to Lorado Taft works hard to reduce their food waste. This semester, we would, once again, like to acknowledge those schools who have reached the promised land of zero ort. Unfortunately, we do not have the space to recognize the many schools who make it into the "1 Pound Club" by achieving 1 pound of ort or less.

Congratulations and keep working towards zero ort!

