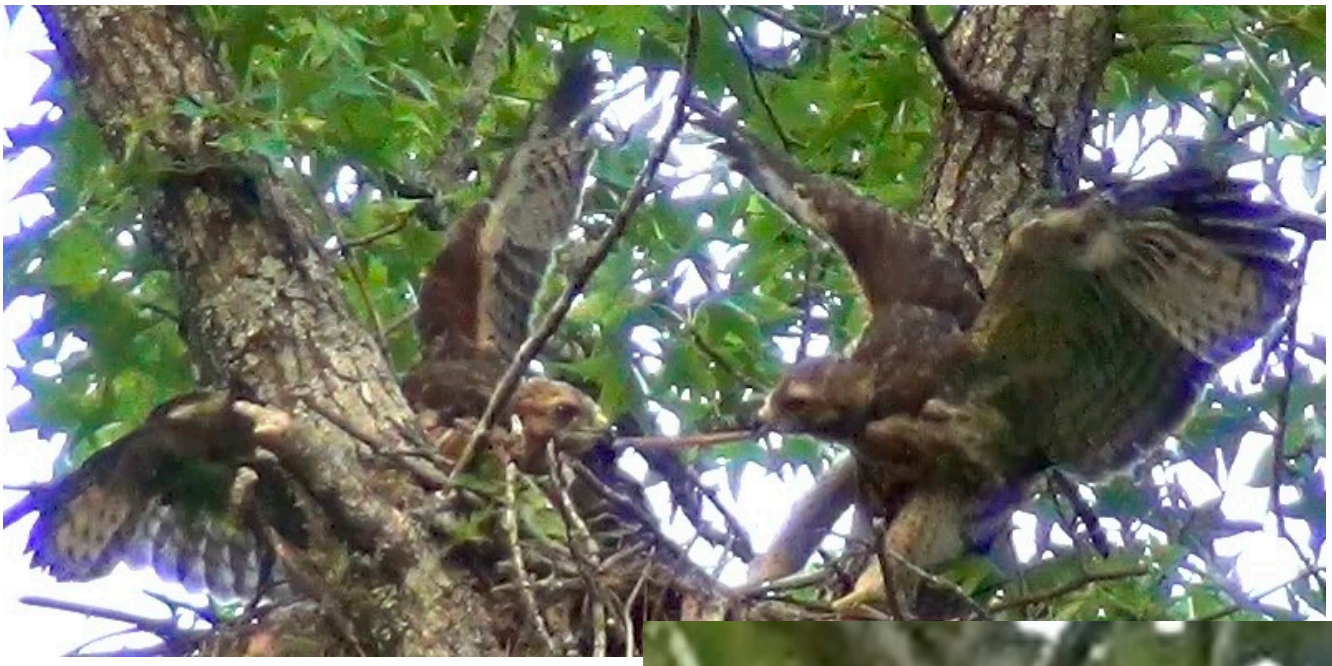
Three nestlings are present in the Red-shouldered Hawk nest above our house. They started the month as small fuzzy-looking creatures, but by the end of the month they were leaving the nest for short flights to adjacent trees.

In the photograph below, one of the parents has just arrived with food. The tail of a lizard can just be seen sticking out of the nestling's mouth.

Above...one of the parents rests before setting off again.

Below..a parent launches itself into the air from the nest. The prominent bars across the tail that are characteristic of Red-shouldered Hawks are well displayed.

Keeping the nest sanitary is accomplished with some well-aimed projectile defecations.



The parents seemed to bring mainly reptiles and amphibians to feed the young. In the top photograph, two nestlings are staging a tug-of-war over a small snake. The middle photograph shows the outline of a lizard in the parent's beak, and the bottom photograph shows one of the nestlings attempting to eat a frog.

The young hawks spent a lot of time stretching their wings and flapping vigorously without getting anywhere. By the end of the month, however, they were flying to other perches in the nest tree (see below) and making short flights to adjacent trees.

Early in May our driveway was littered with fallen male flower clusters from Hickory (above, left) and Sweetgum trees (below). These tree species, and many others, have separate male and female flowers, and depend on wind for pollination. The male flowers are grouped into clusters that produce large amounts of pollen and then are shed from the tree. A general name for flowers that are clustered in this manner is “catkin”. Thus I could complain that my driveway was covered with catkins. The word “catkin” comes from the Dutch *katteken*, which means “kitten” and refers to the resemblance of these flower clusters to a kitten’s tail.

Oxalis violacea, the Violet Wood Sorrel, is fairly common in dry woods. The individual pictured here is growing in the woods behind our house. It is a perennial, but the number of plants that emerge each year seems to vary quite a bit.

All parts of the plant are edible, and it has a sour taste. However, it should be eaten only in small quantities, because it contains oxalic acid,which is poisonous. Precipitation of oxalic acid can occur in the kidneys to form kidney stones, which are composed of calcium oxalate.

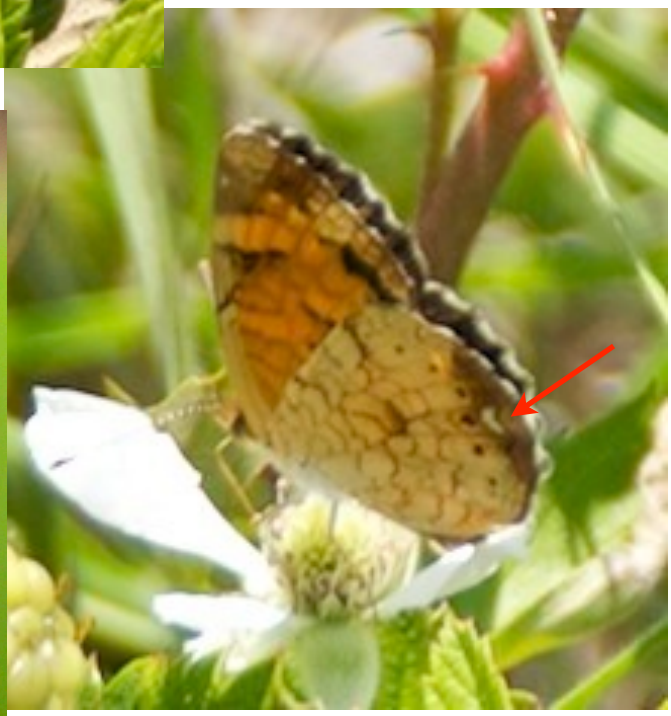
The common name “Sorrel” was given because the sour taste reminded early settlers of European Sorrel, which is a distantly related plant (*Rumex acetosa*). The word “sorrel” is derived from Old German for “sour”.

Wild Garlic (*Allium veneale*), also called Crow Garlic is an invasive species from the Mediterranean region. All parts of the plant have a powerful aroma and taste of garlic, and this can be imparted to beef products from cattle who graze on the plant. The plant is not a suitable substitute for the garlic used in cooking (which is *Allium sativum)*, because Wild Garlic leaves an unpleasant aftertaste.

The flower heads are at first enclosed in a filmy modified leaf. The heads may contain no flowers at all and consist solely of tiny bulbs (bulbils) as shown to the right, or a mixture of bulbils and flowers may be present (below).

The bulbils usually begin to grow precociously before they are shed from the plant (right).

Two views of a Pearl Crescent Butterfly (*Phyciodes tharos*) are shown here. This, and closely related species, are called “crescents” because of a small, crescent-shaped spot near the trailing edge of the hindwing (arrow).



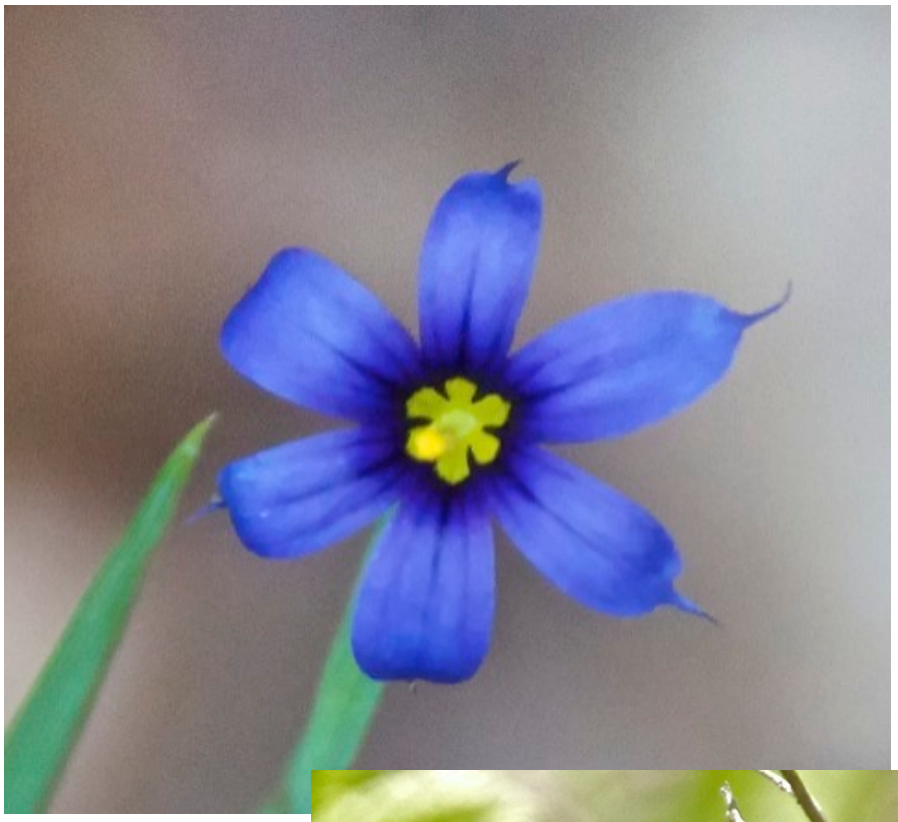
We don’t see very many bright red wildflowers in our Spring woodlands. An exception is the Indian Pink or Pinkroot (*Spigelia marilandica*) shown to the left. The plant contains a toxic alkaloid, and root extracts were once used as a vermifuge by Native Americans and European settlers.

This plant does well in cultivation, and is sometimes offered for sale in commercial nurseries.

Two caterpillars that visited the house this month are shown here. The upper one is, I think, the larva of the Virgin Tiger Moth (*Grammia virgo*).

Below is another bristly caterpillar next to a hickory catkin. I think it is in the family Arctiidae, but I am not sure of identification beyond that.

Spines on caterpillars are sometimes microscopically barbed, and can cause skin irritation. So it is best to be careful handling them. Some species incorporate their spines into their cocoon when they pupate thus providing additional protection from predators.



Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*) is neither a grass nor is it "blue-eyed". It is a member of the Iris family (Iridaceae), and it has a yellow "eye" in the center of the flower. The tiny flowers are only about an inch wide, but they stand out because of their bright color.

There are about 100 species of this genus, all in the New World.

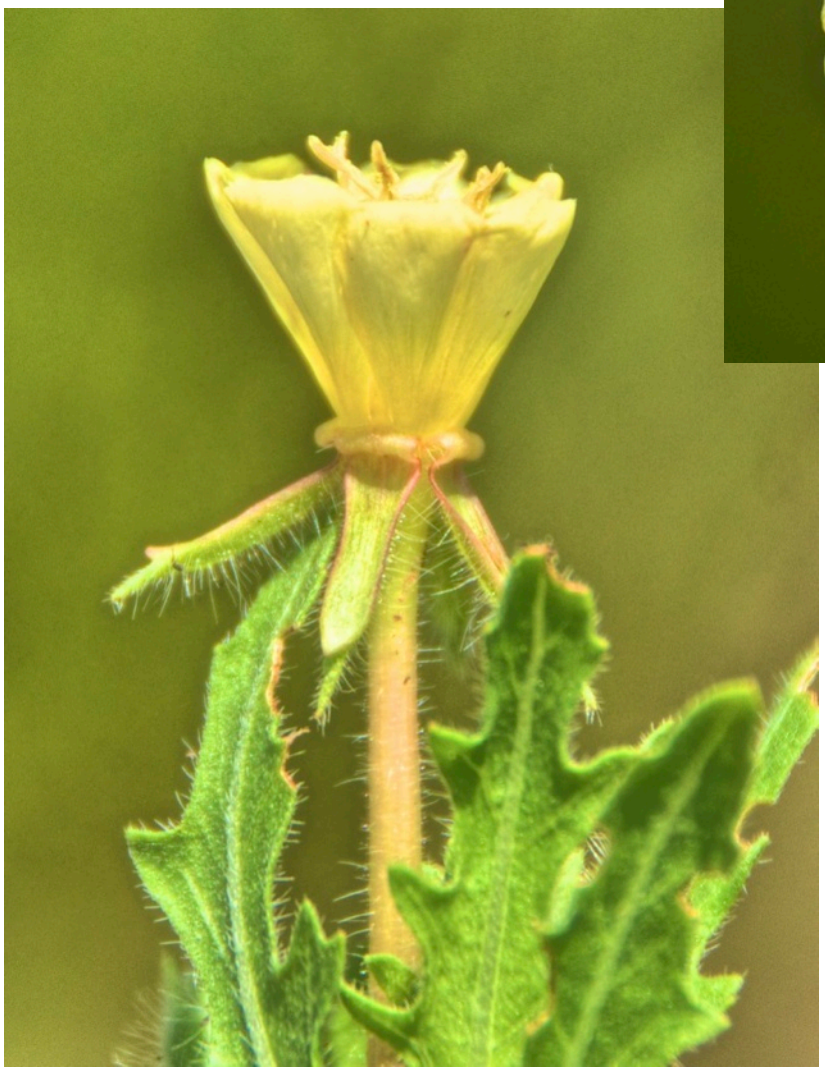
Lots of Widow Skimmers (*Libelula luctuosa*) have been flying about in the field near the end of our driveway. The one pictured is either a female or an immature male. This is one of the easiest dragonfly species to identify, because no other in our area has this distinctive wing pattern. Mature males have a solid blue body, but the wing pattern is similar.

Eastern Kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) are "flytcatchers". They perch on fences or other prominent places from where they launch themselves to capture flying insects. They may also hover to snatch insects from vegetation. Despite the common name "Eastern Kingbird", they are found coast to coast in North America during the breeding season. [There is also a Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) that breeds only in Western North America.] Eastern Kingbirds migrate to South America in the Winter, where they gather in flocks.

During breeding season, Eastern Kingbirds are famously aggressive in defending their territory. Each pair defends a small territory around the nest. They do not harass smaller birds, but any hawk, raven, or crow that gets too close will be attacked by both the female and the male. This aggressive behavior gives them both their common name of "Kingbird" and their scientific name, which means "tyrant of tyrants".

Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) lay their eggs in the nests of other species and depend on the nest-builders to raise their young. Eastern Kingbirds recognize Cowbird eggs and remove them from their nest.

To identify Eastern Kingbirds, look for the conspicuous white band at the end of their tail feathers.



The genus *Oenothera* has about 125 species, and many of them are valued as wild flowers or cultivated ornamentals. Common names include “Evening Primrose” or “Sundrops”. The two species pictured here were photographed along roadsides near our house.

The upper photograph is *Oenothera fruticosa*, and the middle and left photographs are *Oenothera llacinata*, the Cut-leafed Evening Primrose.

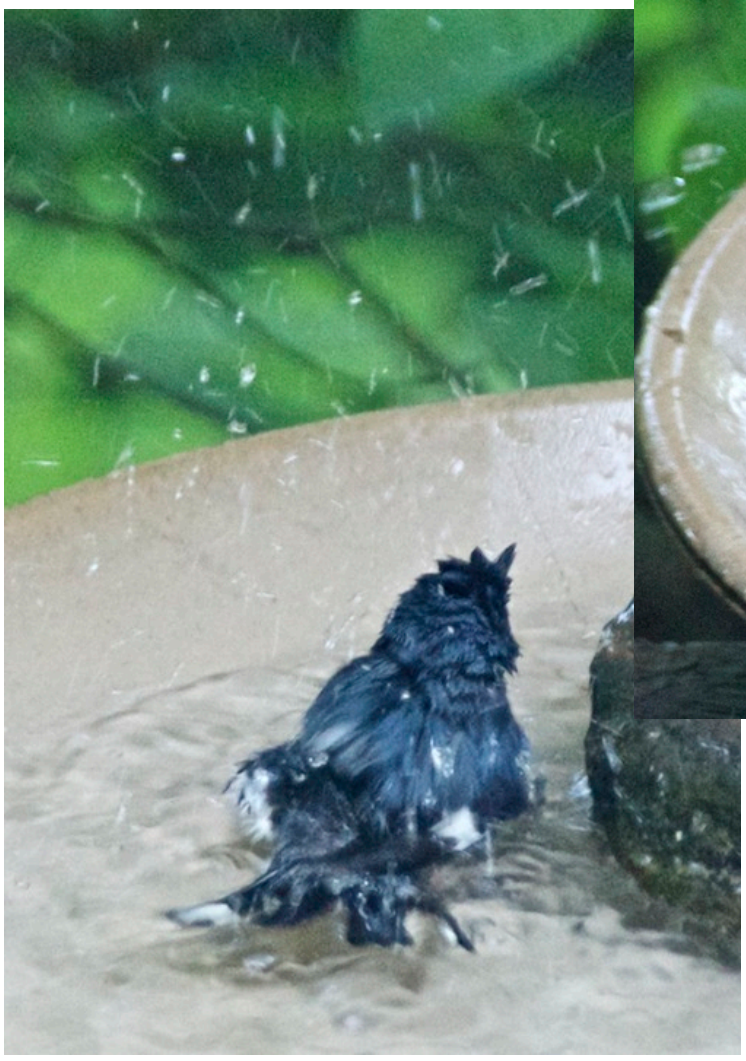
A clump of these little yellow flowers volunteered this year in the woods near the corner of our garage. I have not seen them in other years. This is *Lysimachia ciliata*, Fringed Loosestrife, a native plant in our area.

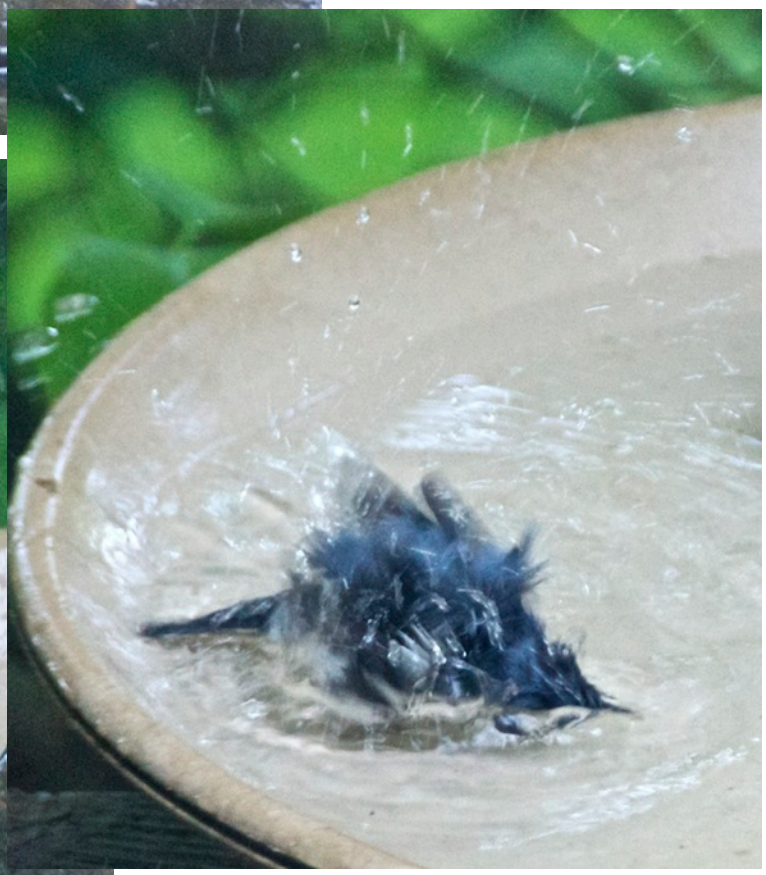
The genus name is derived from Lysimachus, who was a king of ancient Sicily. He supposedly used a relative of this plant to calm a crazed ox. If Lysimachus's name is translated from the Greek, it means "easing the battle", hence the common name "Loosestrife" for this plant.

Extracts of several species of *Lysimachia* are used in herbal medicine in many parts of the world. American colonists are reported to have fed this plant to oxen to get them to work together peacefully, and in Ireland it is said that it has been used to help members of families get along with each other. So these humble plants are purportedly "loosening strife" all over the world!

This plant, as well as several other species of *Lysimachia*, are cultivated as ornamentals., and many horticultural varieties have been produced.

A Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Setophaga caerulescens*) stops in for a bath at the back deck. The Tufted Titmouse waiting its turn demurely looks away.





Two views of a very vigorous bath by the warbler.

A very well-washed warbler.

Cardinals (*Cardinalis* cardinalis*)* like a bath also.

16

The Hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) is an interesting small tree. The female flowers resemble the flowers of the Hop plant (*Humulus lupulus*) which are used as a flavoring agent and preservative in beer.

The wood of Hophornbeam is very dense and hard; another name for the tree is Ironwood. The generic name *Ostrya* means “bone-like in Greek, and it refers to the hardness of the wood. Hophornbeam has been used for making various sorts of tools, such as the base plate of wood planes.

All the stages of Blackberries are on display this month. At first glance, the white flowers might appear simple, but each “flower” is actually a cluster of flowers that gives rise to a compound fruit. Each of the segments of the Blackberry comes from a separate small flower.

Blackberries are red before they are ripe. In the photograph below, the individual flowers have retained their stigmas after the berry is well-formed.