

Volunteer Role Description

Title

Signs of the Seasons: A New England Phenology Project

What is Phenology? Phenology is the study of the seasonal timing of cyclical life events, which include bird, fish, and mammal migrations; insect emergence; plant leafing, blooming, fruiting, and changing of leaf colors in autumn; egg-laying; and emergence from hibernation. With environments changing through human activities including global climate change, we can track the seasonal changes, or phenology, of plants and animals to learn more about our natural world and how we can adapt to these changing environments.

Location

A local park, school grounds, field, or backyard—somewhere close to where you live that has the common plants on our list to observe.

Objective

Increase awareness and knowledge about our changing climate through observations of the seasonal cycles of common plants growing in places near where you live.

Qualifications

We are looking for volunteers that are interested in volunteering to record observations in their own community! No previous experience necessary and it doesn't take a lot of time!

Responsibilities

You will become trained in observing and recording seasonal changes in certain plant(s) and/or animal(s). You will be responsible for making observations and recording them in a simple online database. We will assist you in every step of the process, which includes:

- Selecting an appropriate site
- Selecting a plant/animal species from our SOS list of common plants
- Selecting individual plants either in your backyard or a place near you
- Marking your sites and individual plants
- Getting organized
- Recording your observations
- Entering your observations online

Time Commitment

Time commitment will vary depending on which plants/animals you are observing and the season: Fifteen minutes to half an hour weekly or bi-monthly spring through fall. This could be a shared role with another volunteer(s).

Training/Support

Initial field training will be provided regionally as well as short video training programs, website resources and a volunteer handbook will be provided. Email and phone support will be available to volunteers during the monitoring season. Materials, equipment and online resources for *Signs of the Seasons* will be made available to volunteers. To become more familiar, you can check out the USA Phenology Network website, which contains a lot of good information and is where observations will be recorded for our program: <http://www.usanpn.org/>

Benefits

- * Learn new skills of observation and data collection
- * Learn about plants/animals and the environment
- * Contribute to important scientific studies
- * Enjoy being outside and sharing this time with others

Signs of the Seasons Indicator Species:

- Red maple, *Acer rubrum*
- Sugar maple, *Acer saccharum*
- Common dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*
- Common lilac, *Syringa vulgaris*
- Forsythia, *Forsythia sp.*
- Common reed, *Phragmites australis*
- Beach rose, *Rosa Rugosa*
- Wild strawberry, *Fragaria virginiana*
- Milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca*
- Monarch butterfly, *Danaus plexippus*
- American robin, *Turdus migratorius*
- Ruby-throated hummingbird, *Archilochus colubris*
- Common loon, *Gavia immer*
- American toad, *Anaxyrus americanus*
- Spring peeper, *Pseudacris crucifer*
- Wood frog, *Lithobates sylvaticus*

Coastal Species

- Rockweed, *Ascophyllum nodosum*

More Information about the importance of *Signs of the Seasons*

Why Is It Important?

Phenology, put another way, is simply *nature's calendar*—when the cherry flowers bloom, the robin builds its nest, and the leaves turn colors in the fall. This schedule is critical for plants and animals, and people too. When a caterpillar emerges, it needs developing leaves to eat. When a chick hatches, it needs caterpillars and other food to eat. For many people, allergy season starts when particular flowers bloom—earlier flowering means earlier allergies. Farmers and gardeners need to know when to plant to avoid frosts, and they need to know the schedule of plant and insect development to decide when and how to protect their crops. In fact, phenology affects nearly all aspects of the environment, including the abundance and diversity of organisms, their interactions with one-another, their functions in food webs and their seasonal behavior, and global-scale cycles of water, carbon, and other chemical elements.

The timing of phenological events is important for:

- health (allergens and infectious diseases)
- recreation (wildflower displays, wildlife viewing, and fall colors)
- agriculture (planting and harvest times, pest control)
- management of natural resources (water and timber)
- understanding hazards (monitoring and prediction of drought and fire risk)
- conservation (abundance and diversity of plants and animals)

For more information:

To learn more about how you can get involved in this exciting project, please contact:

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