

Phenology Along the Mississippi River

First of all, phenology, for those of you who do not know, such as myself before this class, is the study of the timing of natural events. This can range from when the first snow occurs to when the mayflies come out and lay their eggs. Phenology not only allows us to see how the natural world functions, but it also can help us to see what impact our various human behaviors have on the natural environment.

Trees

If the leaves are pale green and have five lobes with smooth or wavy pointed edges, the tree is a sugar maple. The sugar maple sap is what most real maple syrup is made from.

Silver maple leaves are silvery white and have five, or once in a while three, deeply cut lobes with jagged edges. Maples with leaves that are whitish green and have three and on occasion five shallowly cut lobes with sharply toothed edges are red maples. The trees should start to leaf out by early to mid may, but they can be a little bit difficult to see when they first start, so I will have to pay close attention on the trip to see when the maple trees start to leaf out.

Mosquitoes

There are more than fifty species of mosquitoes in Minnesota alone, and more than one hundred seventy species of mosquitoes in North America, and three thousand species of mosquitoes in North America. Many of these mosquito species live along the Mississippi river. Mosquitoes need water to complete their life cycle. Mosquitoes, also need blood to reproduce and that is why the females who do bite us bite us in the first place. They are not angry with us or even eating us they are simply trying to reproduce. A very interesting fact about mosquitoes is that the male mosquitoes are vegetarians and do not bite people. Mosquitoes are attracted to CO₂, which is what humans exhale out, thus is why they are often quite bothersome. CO₂ is also a pollutant of many mechanical devices and who are using those devices? Well, us, of course. Mosquitoes typically come out when it has been well above freezing for several days, so depending on the weather there may be out the first day or we might not see them for a few weeks. I will be looking for when the first mosquitoes bite during our Paddle for the Planet canoe trip and jot it down to report back after the trip.