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# LIVING

# Mists and melancholy

With September comes the beginning of fall, a season of melancholy joy and sentimentality. It is both a time of new beginnings and wistful endings. Almost without our knowing it, most of our migratory songbirds will slip away this month. Listening to their calls in the night sky, one feels a certain sadness at their departure but also a sense of wonder in the mystery of bird migration.



**OUR  
CHANGING  
SEASONS**  
Drew Monkman

A September dawn is ushered in by heavy dews, mist and sunshine softly filtered through countless spider webs. This is a month of yellows and purples as goldenrods and asters completely take over fields and roadsides. In September, we awake to the raucous calls of blue jays and crows and the gentle lisping of white-throated sparrows. During the day, the relentless background chorus of crickets and grasshoppers is punctuated now and again by the lonely call of a spring peeper. Snowy tree crickets join the insect chorus at nightfall as if trying to hang on to the last vestiges of summer with their soft, rhythmic treet, treet calls.

On Sept. 23, the sun will cross the Equator on its annual southward course, marking the official start to fall. However, the leaves of several species of trees and shrubs will have almost reached their colour peak by the time the calendar gets around to acknowledging autumn's arrival. By month's end, the first flights of northern geese will be going over, sparrows will have replaced warblers as the most common migrants, and maples will have begun to set both city streets and country hillsides ablaze with their oranges, reds and yellows.

The following almanac provides an overview of some of the events in the natural world that are typical of September in the Kawarthas. The dates, however, are only an approximation. Many of these events occur over the entire month. There is also a great deal of variability from one year to the next, depending on the vagaries of the weather. You may wish to use the box in front of each date to check off those occurrences that you witness yourself.

- ☐ **1** Fall songbird migration is at its peak. Warblers, vireos, thrushes, swallows and flycatchers are departing for Central and South America in huge numbers.
- ☐ **2** Yellow sulphur butterflies are usually the most common species seen.
- ☐ **3** Frogs are still very common in fields, ditches and damp woodlands. Abundant spiders and other insects provide plentiful food in these habitats.
- ☐ **4** Swarms of flying ants are a common sight, even within the city. As in wasp colonies, winged male ants, along with fully reproductive females, develop in late summer. After mating, the females start a new colony or enter an established one. As for the males, they simply die soon after.
- ☐ **5** Large numbers of blue jays make a mass exodus southward this month. Others will remain, however, to overwinter in the Kawarthas. Their calls are one of the most common bird sounds of September.
- ☐ **6** Goldenrods turn fields into a sea of yellow.
- ☐ **7** The Harvest Moon, the full moon closest to the fall equinox, occurs today. This month and next, the full or near-full moon rises an average of only 30 minutes later for several evenings in a row and lingers above the horizon as it follows a shallow angle up the sky. Its larger size, however, is only an illusion.
- ☐ **8** Migrating monarch butterflies are often seen flying in a southerly direction as they make their way towards their mountain top wintering grounds west of Mexico City.
- ☐ **9** The rather unsightly webs of the fall

*The leaves of several species of trees and shrubs will have almost reached their colour peak by the time the calendar gets around to acknowledging autumn's arrival later this month*



Terry Carpenter, special to The Examiner

webworm stand out noticeably. These large tent-like structures encase the ends of branches of deciduous trees and house colonies of beige tiger moth caterpillars. They only damage the leaves within the web.

- ☐ **10** Baby turtles are hatching from the eggs laid last June.
- ☐ **11** Squirrels and chipmunks are particularly conspicuous in late summer and early

fall. Grey squirrels can be seen burying food that they will dig up and eat during the winter. Red squirrels make caches of conifer cones.

- ☐ **12** Muskellunge and walleye move to shallower water and feed heavily. Walleye in particular develop quite an appetite for frogs.
- ☐ **13** Wild cucumber drapes its numerous branches, flowers and tendrils over shrubs,

fences and fallen trees. The grey, silky plumes of the Virgin's bower, its flowers now gone to seed, are also a common sight in these locations.

☐ **14** Spring peepers and gray treefrogs often call sporadically from woodland trees and shrubs.

☐ **15** Migrating white-throated sparrows arrive in the Kawarthas and are a common sight at feeders for several weeks. They are joined later in the month by white-crowned sparrows and dark-eyed juncos. Be sure to scatter sunflower seed on the ground.

☐ **16** White-tailed deer are feeding heavily this month to build up fat that will supply up to a third of their winter energy needs. A gray-brown winter coat replaces the reddish summer coat in September as well. It is much thicker than the summer coat and offers excellent camouflage in the winter woods.

☐ **17** Spider webs abound in fields and in shrubby, low-lying wet areas. They are most easily seen in the early morning.

☐ **18** Brown and black woolly bear caterpillars are often seen crossing pathways and roads in search of a site to overwinter.

Watch also yellow bear and white American dagger moth caterpillars which are similar in size and also have a hairy appearance.

☐ **19** Purple New England asters and white heath and panicked asters begin to overtake goldenrod as the most common wildflowers of roadsides and fields.

☐ **20** Little brown and big brown bats mate and take up residence in hibernation sites including a limestone along the Moira River near Belleville.

☐ **21** Pegasus and its asterism, the Great Square, is the best-known constellation of the fall. Look for it in the southeastern sky.

☐ **22** Dragonflies are still common, especially the various darners and the small red or yellow meadowhawks.

☐ **23** The fall equinox takes place today at 12:03 a.m. marking the first day of fall. Day and night are almost exactly 12 hours. Both the moon and sun rise due east and set due west.

☐ **24** Sensing the shorter days, beavers begin cutting down trees once again for winter food. Aspens are one their preferred tree species.

☐ **25** The first southbound northern Canada geese go over in high-altitude flocks as they make their way to wintering grounds in the Tennessee Valley. Our local giant Canada geese do not leave the Kawarthas until December or January.

☐ **26** Brook trout feed heavily and start moving upstream in preparation for spawning. Males begin to acquire the deep orange to purple-red underside that distinguishes them during the breeding season.

☐ **27** There are sometimes large "migrations" of frogs across busy roads as they make their way to overwintering sites. Amphibians prefer to travel on warm, wet nights.

☐ **28** By late September or the first week of October, the leaves in northern Peterborough County are usually close to their colour peak.

☐ **29** Mushrooms are usually at their most plentiful and diverse in September. Watch especially for the appearance of shaggy mane mushrooms, Coprinus comatus, which is a sure sign of fall.

☐ **30** Migrating turkey vultures are commonly seen as they make their way south.

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