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LIVING

I fell in love with Algonquin Park in 1964 when my father, along with Ian Blaiklock, took me and a friend, Haig Kelly, on a September canoe trip north of Lake Opeongo.

I still remember the morning mists, vibrant fall colours, and the overwhelming sense of excitement to be traveling through this wilderness area I'd heard so much about.

Just as memorable, Doug Sadler, a well-known local naturalist, author, and educator, came along with us to help open our eyes to the park's flora and fauna. For a 12-year-old boy already interested in nature, this was quite an experience.



OUR CHANGING SEASONS
Drew Monkman

If you have never been to Algonquin, a special treat awaits you.

From stunning scenery and amazing diversity of wildlife to superb canoeing, interpretive trails and guided nature walks, Algonquin is the gem of Ontario's parks.

The good news, too, is that its natural systems are still very much intact.

The diversity of flora and fauna is largely due to Algonquin's size and location.

Like The Kawarthas, Algonquin is a blending zone of northern and southern elements.

For example, both northern and southern flying squirrels are found here. The park is located on a dome with elevations of up to 585 metres above sea level on its western side.

Peterborough, in comparison, is only 191 metres above sea level.

Algonquin's elevation intensifies temperature extremes which makes it more attractive to many northern species.

Visitors to Algonquin are usually most familiar with the park's west side.

This is the section of the park bisected by Highway 60 between Whitney and Huntsville. The landscape is an endless sea of deciduous hardwood hills, dominated by sugar maple. Nestled between the hills are over 1,000 lakes.

If you want to get a first-hand sense of how big an area the park covers — nearly 8,000 square kilometres — hike up to the magnificent lookout on the aptly-named Lookout Trail, located at km 40 on Highway 60.

The soil on the west side is glacial till, a mixture of rocks, gravel, sand and silt that was deposited when the glaciers retreated 11,000 years ago. This type of soil traps moisture, which makes it perfect for species such as yellow birch, American beech, eastern hemlock, and especially sugar maple.

Given the abundance of hardwoods, the west side of Algonquin is synonymous with spectacular fall colours.

Although colour intensity varies from year to year and different species reach their best colour at different times, the last week of September and the first week of October usually provide the most flamboyant display. This is usually when the reds, oranges, and yellows of the maples reach their peak. However, as October progresses, the deep yellow of the poplars offers up a sensational spectacle, as well, followed by the reddish-brown of distant oaks and the smoky-gold of bog-loving tamaracs.

An equally compelling show of colour can also be seen in May when myriad wildflowers bloom in these same hardwood forests.

White, red, and painted trillium can all be found in profusion along

Northern beauty

Algonquin Park offers incomparable wildlife experience



Top, a great deal of research has been done on Algonquin's gray jays. (L-r) Crossbills, such as this white-winged, are also Algonquin specialties. Moose are commonly seen along Highway 60 in the park. Algonquin is well known for its northern bird species such as the spruce grouse. And red crossbills glean grit off the road.

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with stunning carpets of trout lily and spring beauty.

As soon as the dense shade of the overhead canopy of leaves appears, however, the flowers disappear.

By July, about the only wildflowers in bloom are wood sorrel, a delicate plant with clover-like leaves which grows in the deep shade of hemlock groves, and Indian pipe, a ghost-like, leafless species which contains no chlorophyll.

Nevertheless, there are still showy wildflowers to be seen in summer. Right now, skeins of mostly white flowers brighten Algonquin's wetlands with meadowsweet, tall meadow-rue, common elderberry, and fragrant white water lilies all in bloom.

Roadside plants are also of interest throughout the summer months. Among these are the beautiful magenta spikes of fireweed.

Traditionally, this species was dependent on forest fires for the creation of suitable habitat but now thrives along roadsides. White pearly everlasting also blooms in great abundance, often in the driest, sunniest areas.

The park's east side presents a much different flora. Instead of glacial till, the land here was covered by great beds of sand, deposited by enormous rivers flowing from the melting glaciers. Because sand is unable to trap moisture, it quickly dries out. Most hardwoods therefore, do not do well here.

Instead, the dominant tree species on the east side of Algonquin are white, red and jack pines as well as trembling aspen. Pink lady's-slipper orchids abound in these forests in the spring.

The east side is also home to the

In mood for a wolf howl?

Algonquin Park is renowned for its wolves.

It was once believed that Algonquin's wolves were simply a small race of the gray wolf. However, new genetic evidence has shown that they are a completely different species, now called the eastern wolf (*Canis lycaon*). Thursdays in August are designated as Public Wolf Howl days — an interpretive event in which naturalists attempt to get wolves to respond to recorded howls or human imitations.

Park visitors drive to a location where a wolf pack has been heard the previous night. The event will only be held if a pack has been found in an appropriate location.

Call the visitor centre at (613) 637-2828 on Thursday mornings to see if an event will take place that evening.

— Drew Monkman

Barron Canyon where barn swallows still nest under cliffs like in ancient times. The Barron Canyon Trail offers magnificent views of the gorge and the Barron River below and is definitely a must-see.

Algonquin Park offers some of the best wildlife-viewing opportunities anywhere. Low-lying wet areas such as bogs and ponds are usually the best places to see mammals, especially in the early morning or just before dark.

Several interpretive trails along Highway 60 have been designed expressly for the purpose of seeing wild animals. These include the Beaver Pond Trail, Spruce Bog Boardwalk and particularly the Mizzy Lake Trail.

Surprisingly, the Highway 60 corridor itself is an excellent location for seeing wildlife.

From late April through June, moose are easily viewed in roadside ditches where they glean salt from winter road maintenance operations.

By late June and through July, however, they are more commonly seen feeding on water plants in the numerous lakes, ponds, and streams along the highway.

Opeongo Road (north of the bridge) and the Mizzy Lake Trail are also good places to see these magnificent animals. Although moose become far less visible in August, they do make a re-appearance of sorts in late September and early October when the rut, or mating season, occurs.

With a bit of effort, you should be able to see a bull moose at this time, decked out with a huge rack of polished antlers, and framed by flaming leaves.

Algonquin's moose population has suffered a decline in recent years as a result of an overly dense population, lack of food, and winter tick infestations.

However, this is normal. Moose mortality linked to infection from brainworm does not appear to be a serious problem right now.

The brainworm is a parasite carried by white-tailed deer.

With a little luck, you may also be able to see black bears, especially in summer. From mid-July to

mid-August when raspberries and blueberries ripen, bruins are busily stuffing themselves in order to fatten up for the winter. A slow drive along Opeongo or Rock Lake Road sometimes results in a bear sighting.

If you go out just before sunset, mid-summer can also be a good time to observe beavers. However, to see them during the day, it's usually necessary to wait until October. Otters, too, are very common in Algonquin.

A huge diversity of birds, about 260 different species at last count, can also be found in Algonquin Park. Of particular interest to birders are those species with a more northern affinity such as boreal chickadee, spruce grouse, red and white-winged crossbills, black-backed woodpecker and gray jay. On the park's west side, the Spruce Bog Boardwalk Trail, Mizzy Lake Trail and the road into Lake Opeongo are three of the best areas for finding northern species.

The west side, too, has many of the same northern species. Because of the abundance of pine, there are also large numbers of red crossbills. This is a species that specializes in extracting seeds from pine cones. Red crossbills are often especially common around Lake Travers and Grand Lake.

Whip-poor-wills can still be heard in many areas as well.

To get to Algonquin Park, take Highway 28 north to Bancroft. Continue on Highway 62 to Maynooth and then Highway 127 to Highway 60 which leads into the Park at Whitney. The east side of Algonquin is accessed from just north of Pembroke.