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LIVING

The true new year

*Best I love September's yellow,
Morns of dew strong gossamer,
Thoughtful days without a stir,
Rooky clamours, brazen leaves,
Stubble dotted o'er with sheaves -
More than Spring's bright uncon-
trol*

Suit the Autumn of my soul.

Alex Smith



OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Drew Monkman

Few would argue that autumn's arrival carries a stronger emotional charge than any other change of season. From the vibrant colour and smell of the fall leaves to the cooler temperatures and misty mornings, fall resonates with sentimentality. I suppose it partly stems from the nostalgia of summer's more relaxed lifestyle being over, the return to our often hectic schedules, saying goodbye to people you might not see for another year, and witnessing nature's preparations for winter. Fall, too, is a season of time-honoured traditions and celebrations. Be it raking leaves, closing the cottage, getting together with family for Thanksgiving or going on the deer hunt, an element of wistfulness and reminiscence never seems to be far away.

For many, September brings a surge of energy. The generally cooler temperatures seem to compel us to shake our summer lethargy and get out and do something — start a project we put off all summer, clean out the garden, stack wood, or go for a walk in the woods. As school reconvenes and myriad community activities begin again, this is the true New Year.

The following is an overview of events in our flora, fauna, weather, and night sky that represent a typical September in the Kawarthas. Many events, however, occur over the entire month and into October.

□ **1** — Fall songbird migration is at its peak. For birders, this means great warbler watching. There is an added challenge in the fall, however, since some species sport a much drabber plumage.

□ **2** — Berries continue to be abundant. Watch for the “doll's eyes” of white baneberry, a woodland species, as well as the wax-white berries of poison ivy.

□ **3** — The staccato “chuck-chuck” of chipmunks is a common woodland sound as they collect nuts and seeds to store in underground pantries. Gray squirrels, too, are busy burying food items in shallow holes that they dig in the soil. Both species will need these provisions to survive the winter. Another member of the squirrel family, the groundhog, will sometimes begin hibernation as early as the end of September.

□ **4** — Spectacular swarms of flying ants are a common September phenomenon. Some are females — the potential future queens — but the majority are males. A given ant species will swarm and mate on the same day over huge areas, sometimes covering hundreds of kilometres. The males soon die, and the mated females disperse to try to start up a new colony.

□ **5** — The most typical bird sounds of September are the raucous calls of blue jays and crows. Most of Ontario's blue jay popula-

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Karl Egressy, special to The Examiner

It's possible to hear the plaintive contact calls of migrating Swainson's thrushes on September nights.

tion actually migrates to the U.S. in the winter

□ **6** — Canada goldenrod transforms fields into a sea of yellow. The Kawarthas boast at least 15 goldenrod species including blue-stemmed and zigzag goldenrod which grow in open woodlands.

□ **7** — Fringed and bottle gentians are in bloom. Other September wildflowers to watch for include false dragon-head, grass-of-Parnassus, and ladies'-tresses orchids.

□ **8** — Monarchs are not the only butterflies migrating south right now. The red admiral, too, is unable to tolerate the Canadian winter and must migrate. However, it goes no further south than the southern U.S. A new generation then returns to Canada each spring.

□ **9** — Venus, the brightest of the planets, is now a “morning star” and rises just ahead of the sun each morning in early September. Look for the thin waning crescent moon just to the left of Venus today.

□ **10** — Keep an eye out for the beautiful yellow and black golden garden spider. It often builds its big web of sticky spiral threads in a clump of goldenrod and hangs conspicuously right in the hub.

□ **11** — It's really beginning to look and feel like fall. Daylight and darkness are now almost equal in duration. On cool mornings, heavy mists dance and curl over rivers, lakes and valleys.

□ **12** — Part of the green darner dragonfly population actually migrates south in the fall, while the others overwinter in the Kawarthas in the nymph stage of the life cycle. Migratory green darners are capable of flying up to 137 kilometres in a day, most likely to the southern U.S. It is thought that the same individuals

return north in the spring.

□ **13** — Two vines are very much in evidence right now, especially along rail-trails and woodland edges where they sprawl over fences, shrubs and trees. They are wild cucumber, which has cucumber-like seed pods covered in soft bristles, and virgin's bower, identified by its distinctive, fluffy seed-heads of grey, silky plumes.

□ **14** — If there's sufficient moisture, mushrooms are at their most plentiful and diverse in September. The giant puffball is sometimes found in fields and looks like an errant soccer ball or loaf of white bread. It is edible when young. If you step on an old one, brown, dust-like spores will puff out.

□ **15** — Ruby-throated hummingbirds abandon our feeders and surrender to the urge to migrate. Most ruby-throats winter in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula and in Central America. The southward flight includes a remarkable non-stop crossing of the Gulf of Mexico, taking 18-20 hours.

□ **16** — Virginia creeper and poison ivy turn a fiery red as well as some sumacs and an increasing number of maples.

□ **17** — In mid-September, the first sub-freezing temperatures are traditionally recorded along with the first frost. It will be interesting to see how climate change affects this occurrence.

□ **18** — Brown and black woolly bear caterpillars are a common sight, especially on paths and side-walks. People used to believe that the length of the middle brown band could foretell the severity of the coming winter. The longer the band, the shorter and milder the winter would be. In reality, the caterpillar simply becomes increasingly brown as it ages.

□ **19** — Be sure to put your bird feeders up if you haven't already

done so. Among other birds, white throated sparrows are migrating through and are easy to attract if you scatter black oil sunflower seed on the ground.

□ **20** — Oaks are now shedding their acorns. They are gobbled up by all manner of animals including deer, bear, squirrels and blue jays.

□ **21** — American robins form large flocks in September. Rarely seen on lawns now, they prefer to gorge themselves on berries. Fall robins seem somehow wilder, as if possessed by a restless urgency.

□ **22** — Migrant warblers and vireos often join up with mixed flocks of chickadees and nuthatches in the fall and will come in remarkably close in response to “pishing.” Simply take a deep breath and softly but quickly repeat the word “pish” in one, drawn-out exhale. Keep it up for at least a minute or two.

□ **23** — The fall equinox takes place today at 5:51 a.m. marking

the beginning of autumn. Day and night are almost exactly 12 hours. Today, both the moon and sun rise due east and set due west. After today, they will rise and set increasingly to the south until the winter solstice.

□ **24** — The myriad grasses that bloomed in the summer are actually easiest to identify in the fall. This is because seeds, rather than flowers, are the most important features for identification.

□ **25** — Large migratory flights of thrushes often pass over about this time. Their loud, plaintive call notes are surprisingly easy to hear in the night sky, even over the city. Migration is usually at its best just after the passage of a cold front when northwesterly breezes provide tail winds.

□ **26** — The Harvest Moon, the full moon closest to the fall equinox, occurs today. For several evenings in a row, the moon rises at almost the same time and climbs more slowly than usual up into the sky. Watch, too, for Jupiter which will be shining brightly in the south.

□ **27** — The purples, mauves, and whites of asters now reign supreme in fields and along roadsides. The Kawarthas have about 15 species of these late bloomers that represent the year's last offering of wildflowers. The more common species include New England, heath and panicked asters.

□ **28** — The webs of the fall webworm stand out noticeably. The large, loose structures encase the ends of branches of broad-leaved trees and shrubs and house colonies of small, beige caterpillars covered with long hairs.

□ **29** — Most years, white ash, pin cherry, and staghorn sumac reach their colour peak about now. Some ash trees turn a stunning purple-bronze that literally glows in the September sun.

□ **30** — Ospreys leave the Kawarthas for their wintering grounds in the West Indies and Central and South America. Mangroves, rainforests and coastal estuaries will be their home until next spring.

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While The Examiner grows its own website with more photos, more videos, more stories and more ways of giving you information, you can now register to be part of the community website that will also be on our web address.

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on a community web site that allows you to download directly onto it.

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