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LIVING

It's hot, but fall is creeping up

In August bird songs are stilled, fruit blossoms an, leaves begin to turn

As in much of the rest of the world, the story so far this summer in the Kawarthas has been the unrelenting heat. The Globe and Mail reported on July 17 that 2010 may prove to be the hottest year since record-keeping began in 1880. Since January, temperatures have been 3.9 degrees above average.



Drew Monkman

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Part of the reason for the rising temperatures is the shrinking Arctic ice cover. In June, the amount of ice present was the smallest since record-keeping began in 1979. According to Danny Harvey, a climate researcher at the University of Toronto, "Ice reflects sun and when you melt it, the Earth absorbs more heat, which causes more warming. So when you lose ice, it means we're in big trouble." Although it's difficult to say that any particular weather event, considered in isolation, is a result of climate change, it is now clear that the overall trend, as predicted by climate scientists for the past three decades, is most definitely one of a changing climate.

In this context of a warmer world, the behaviours of plants and animals are also changing. We can, for example, expect that many of the typical events of August that are listed below will occur ahead of their average date. This has certainly been the pattern with plant flowering and insect activity so far this summer.

- **1** Although shady woods are now devoid of flowers, a large variety of shade-tolerant ferns have taken their place and are lots of fun to try to identify. Among the more common species to expect are wood fern, ostrich fern, maidenhair fern, sensitive fern, Christmas fern, lady fern, and interrupted fern. The Millbrook Valley Trails, which begin at the millpond in the village of Millbrook, are rich in ferns.

- **2** With its reproductive purpose now completed, bird song has faded to only a shadow of what it was in May and June. Other than the sporadic singing of a handful of species such as vireos, cardinals, mourning doves, peewees and song sparrows, most bird song – as opposed to calls – has ceased.

- **3** Evening primrose blooms in waste places and along roadsides in early August. Unlike most other plants, the yellow flowers open their petals only in the evening, hence its name. The flowers also release a strong fragrance that attracts moths, the only available nighttime pollinators.

- **4** Leopard frogs wander en masse from their wetland habitat to invade nearby fields where they feast on the abundant insects. Easy to identify because of its light-edged, dark spots, the leopard frogs jumps in a zig-zag fashion when pursued.

- **5** Cedar waxwings are a common August bird. Watch for them perched on the branches of dead trees along the River Road between Trent University and Lakefield. They



Cedar waxwing

KARL EGRESSY photo

Sensitive fern (right) is one of many varieties of shade-loving ferns that now dominate the forest floor, while pale corydalis (below right) can be found blooming on granite rocks in the Kawarthas.

The Perseid meteor shower peaks on Aug. 12 and 13, a chance for amateur astronomers to be treated to a great show (bottom photo).



DREW MONKMAN photo



sally out from these branches to catch insects on the wing.

- **6** The bladderwort, an aquatic plant with half-inch yellow flowers, is now in bloom in local wetlands. Its carrot-like leaves can be seen on or just below the surface of the water. Green sacks called bladders can be found scattered among the leaves' many branches. The bladders, which have a small opening into the hollow centre, serve to trap the insects that venture into these openings. The insects provide the plant with valuable nutrients.

- **7** Venus, Mars, and Saturn are easily visible in the western sky this month shortly after sunset. Venus is by far the brightest, outshining the other two by a huge margin. These three planets will form a "planetary trio" around Aug. 7. This refers to a grouping of planets that will fit into a circle only five degrees wide. Go to <http://earth-sky.org/tonight/> for an illustration of what to expect.

- **8** Ants are abundant this month, even on the granite rocks of the Canadian Shield. Most of these are formicine ants and are usually either black or black and red. Although they are not aggress-

sive, some can deliver a small sting. There are no "red ants" or fire ants in Canada, other than an exotic species that has turned up in a handful of

large cities.

- **9** Watch for underwing moths, named for the bright colours of the underwings. However, when the underwings are hidden, all that is visible is the mottled brown or grey of the forewings which look very similar to bark. These moths can be attracted by applying a sugary concoction to tree trunks. A cup of white sugar, two or more mashed bananas, one ounce of molasses, a bottle of beer, and a pinch of yeast to help with fermentation will usually do the trick. Look for the moths once it gets dark. Don't forget your camera!

- **10** Not all butterflies frequent sunny meadows. One species, the northern pearly eye, is actually a denizen of shady deciduous woods. It gets its name from the 20 eyespots – each with a pearl-like centre – that are best seen on the underside of the wings. This fast-flying species seems to disappear completely when it lands on rough, dark tree trunk.

- **11** Bobolinks have mostly gathered into flocks and taken refuge in marshes. Silent and often hidden, they are in the process of molting. By month's end, most will have departed for central South America.

- **12** The Perseid meteor shower peaks tonight and tomorrow morning. Because the moon is only two days past the new moon phase, there will be no moonlight tonight. This means dark skies and, hopefully, plenty of meteors. The show begins at about 10 p.m. but will be at its best between midnight and dawn Friday morning. Be sure to find a

dark-sky location and watch for at least an hour or more. This should be a great year for the Perseids.

- **13** Children love the exploding seeds of the spotted jewelweed, also known as touch-me-not. The plant is easily identified by its spotted, horn-shaped flowers that hang on stalks. When ripe, the inch-long seed pods will explode when touched, scattering seeds in all directions. Watch for these plants along the edges of wet areas.

- **14** If you're out walking along our rail trails or gravel roads, watch for Carolina locusts. With their yellow-bordered wings and the crackling sound they make as they fly, they are hard to miss. Because of the wing pattern, I've been tricked on more than one occasion into thinking I was seeing a mourning cloak butterfly instead of a grasshopper!

- **15** August is synonymous with trees and shrubs laden with fruit. Among the most conspicuous fruits are those of tartarian honeysuckle, European buckthorn, choke cherry, Virginia creeper, highbush-cranberry, common elderberry, and the various types of dogwoods. There seems to be a greater than average amount of fruit this year on most species.

- **16** Colour change is already noticeable in some trees, shrubs and vines. Red maples growing on lake and wetland edges should already be showing splashes of red and burgundy. The leaves of some sumacs and Virginia creepers, too, have usually begun to acquire their fall colours by now.

- **17** Shorebird migration is at its peak. The shoreline between Beach Three and Owen Point at Presqu'île Provincial Park at Brighton offers great viewing opportunities. A spotting scope, however, can be helpful.

- **18** Ragweed is in bloom, and its pollen has hay fever sufferers cursing with every sneeze. The small, green flowers of ragweed plants rely on the wind to spread their irritating, spike-

covered pollen grains. Remember, goldenrod is not the culprit!

- **19** Monarch butterfly numbers are usually at their highest about now. This is shaping up as a very good summer for monarchs.

- **20** Songbird migration is in full swing, with numerous warblers, vireos and flycatchers moving through. These birds can easily be attracted by pishing. If you see or hear chickadees in late August, you can usually assume that migrants will be with them.

- **21** Small dragonflies known as meadowhawks abound. Mature males are red, while females and immature males are yellowish. They are common in suburban gardens.

- **22** Pale corydalis blooms on the granite rocks of the Kawarthas all month long. The tube-shaped flowers are pink with yellow tips.

- **23** Green frogs and gray treefrogs may continue to call sporadically all month long.

- **24** The soft, rhythmic "treet . . . treet . . . treet" of snowy tree crickets is a common sound. Sounding almost like a gentle-voiced spring peeper, this is the insect you often hear calling in campfire scenes in Westerns.

- **25** Mid-to-late August is a good time to look on milkweed plants for the yellow and black larvae of the monarch butterfly.

They are easy to rear in captivity and provide adults and children alike with a first-hand lesson in insect metamorphosis.

- **26** Eastern yellowjacket wasps are usually very conspicuous by now. They are easily identified by the upper black marking nearest the thorax. It is triangular with a narrow black stem or neck which extends to the upper edge of the abdomen.

- **27** Goldenrods reach peak bloom at month's end and take over as the main roadside and field flowers. These plants are veritable insect magnets, drawing in an amazing variety of species with their offerings of pollen and nectar.

- **28** Listen for the faint contact calls of migrating birds as they pass overhead at night. Because each different type of bird has a unique call note, it is possible to identify both the different species and numbers of individuals flying over.

- **29** Heavy morning mists often complement the beauty of the August sunrise.

- **30** The electric, buzz saw song of the dog-day cicada is still a common sound in late August. The insect's name is appropriate because it seems to love hot, humid, "dog day" weather. If you're wondering why we use the term "dog-day," it is in reference to the fact that Sirius, the brightest star in the Big Dog constellation, shines brightly in the southeastern sky at dawn in late August. The ancient Romans believed that Sirius's heat contributed to the heat of the sun, thereby creating hot and sultry weather.

- **31** Most species of ladies'-tresses orchids bloom in late August, as do fringed and bottle gentian.

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