

# Welcome a slower, gentler pace

## Cool, dark November has its good side (and less rain than you think)

It is a joy to walk in the bare woods. The moonlight is not broken by the heavy leaves. The leaves are down, and touching the soaked earth, Giving off the odors that partridges love."

Robert Bly, *Solitude Late at Night in the Wood*

Although we seldom think of November as being particularly beautiful or interesting, it is actually one of my favourite months. Part of its attraction lies in the change of pace, the slowing down, and the gentle hush that falls upon the land. In November, everything in nature is simplified and stripped to fundamentals. Most migrant birds have departed, and a multitude of species are already in hibernation. Trees are now reduced to their elemental form; vistas, previously hidden by leaves are once again in plain sight; and even the sounds and smells of nature have faded to but a relative few. The sometimes dizzying pace of change that we've seen from April through October has halted. There is no sense of hurry. Finally, we can simply focus on the commonplace and enjoy this interlude before winter's arrival.



Drew Monkman  
OUR CHANGING SEASONS

The events listed below represent an almanac of key happenings in the natural world during a typical November in the Kawarthas.

Deer harvest

- 1. Today marks the beginning of the annual deer harvest by rifle and shotgun. The buck's antlers have matured and hardened now, and they are "in rut," or at the peak of their sexual readiness. Car accidents involving deer are very common this month.

### MONARCHS IN MEXICO

- 2. Monarch butterflies are arriving now in large numbers on their wintering grounds in the Sierra Madre Mountains west of Mexico City. This year monarchs are expected to cover only three hectares of forest. This is well below the long-term average of 7.44 hectares. It is estimated that at least 50% of last year's overwintering population died as a result of devastating storms.
- 3. Ring-billed gulls are one of the most commonly seen birds in November. They spend the night, however, on large bodies of water such as Chemong and Rice lakes where they are safe from predators.
- 4. Other than the occasional clouded sulphur butterfly, cluster fly, or meadowhawk dragonfly, few insects are active. Most have already begun diapause, the state of halted development in which insects overwinter. The stage of the life cycle in which diapause occurs depends on the insect species. For example, queen bumblebees overwinter as pregnant adults, Cecropia moths as pupae in a cocoon, blackflies as aquatic larvae, and grasshoppers as eggs.
- 5. Oaks, tamaracks and silver maples are about the only native deciduous trees that may still retain their foliage in early November. The brownish-orange leaves of red oaks make these trees stand out prominently in



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- comparison to their leafless neighbours. We can easily see just how common oaks are in some areas, especially on the Canadian Shield.
- 6. Numbers of American tree sparrows and northern shrikes increase. Some years, an influx of winter finches such as pine siskins and common redpolls also occurs at this time. Since mid-October, small flocks of purple finches have been showing up at feeders, but they are not expected to remain in Ontario for the winter. Common redpolls, however, should be present in good numbers.
  - 7. We return to Standard Time today. Turn your clocks back one hour. Sunrise will be at 6:58 a.m. and sunset at 4:55 p.m. for a total of only 9 hours and 57 minutes of daylight. Compare this to the 15 and 1/2 hours we enjoyed back in June!
- ### BERRIES BRING COLOUR
- 8. The seeds and fruits of a handful of trees, shrubs and vines not only attract birds but also provide some much needed November colour. The red berries of winterberry holly and high-bush cranberry are especially attractive.
  - 9. With a little luck, you might see a mourning cloak or Compton tortoiseshell butterfly on a warm November day. Both of these species overwinter as adults.
  - 10. You can expect to see large numbers of blue jays this month and throughout the coming winter. This year's abundant acorn crop should be enough to convince lots of these semi-migratory birds to stick around instead



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Red-tailed hawks (top) will soon gather in large numbers. The Lakefield sewage lagoon is a good place to spot ring-necked ducks (above). A young beech tree holds onto its dead leaves (left) to make its twigs less attractive to hungry deer.

- of heading to the central and southern U.S.
- 11. With the onset of cold temperatures, wood frogs, gray treefrogs and spring peepers burrow down into the leaf litter of the forest floor and literally become a small block of amphibian ice – in other words, a frogsicle! Surprisingly, the ice does not harm the animal because it forms in the body cavities outside of the cells. Glycerol, acting as antifreeze, inhibits freezing within the frog's cells.
- ### TOADS RETRENCH
- 12. Toads, as well as salamanders and snakes, are now retreating to below the frost line to overwinter. Bullfrogs, leopard, and green frogs, are settling into the mud at the bottom of lakes, rivers, and wetlands.
  - 13. Early snowfalls reveal the nocturnal world of mammal activity. Coyotes, deer, squirrels, cottontails, mice, and voles are just a few of the species that leave their tracks for us to decipher. An excellent site for identifying mammal tracks and scat can be found at <http://www.bear-tracker.com/>
  - 14. This is a great time of year to focus on several groups of plants of the forest floor that usually escape our attention. Evergreen ferns, club-mosses, and mosses stand out prominently against the brown leaf litter. Some of the most common species include wood fern, rock polypody fern, ground pine and ground cedar club-moss, juniper moss and fire moss.
  - 15. A trip to the Lakefield sewage lagoons, located on the south side of Block Road (County Road 33), just

- south of the village, is well worth the effort at this time of year. You should be able to get good looks at migrant ducks such as common goldeneye, bufflehead, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, and hooded merganser.
- 16. It may come as a surprise to know that November's average number of days with rain is no more than during the summer months.
  - 17. In our woodlands, the only trees still clinging to remnants of their foliage are oaks and young American beech and ironwood (hornbeam). Trees that retain dead leaves are said to be "marcescent." Marcescence may benefit the trees by deterring feeding by large herbivores such as deer and moose. Dead, dry leaves are thought to make the twigs less attractive as a food source.
- ### HUNDREDS OF HAWKS
- 18. Most red-tailed hawks leave the Kawarthas for more southern climes. On a good day, hundreds can be seen migrating along the north shore of Lake Ontario. Some will actually spend the winter along the lakeshore and are a common sight along Hwy. 401. It may be that the wide-open views along highway rights of way provide a perfect place for hawks to hunt.
  - 19. Male great horned owls stake out breeding territories and become quite vocal. A useful mnemonic to remember their call is "who's awake...me, too."
  - 20. Frost is recorded an average of

- 20 days this month. With 2010 being possibly the warmest year on record, it will be interesting to see how many frosty nights occur this November.
- 21. Now that the leaves have fallen from cherry trees and shrubs, black knot fungus, *Apiosporina morbosa*, stands out like charred, animal droppings hanging from the twigs. The dark swellings are actually the cherry's own cells that have gone amok because of the fungus.
  - 22. Ball-like swellings known as galls are easy to see on the stems of goldenrod plants. If you open the gall with a knife, you will find the small, white larva of the goldenrod gall fly inside. The larva spends the winter in this cozy enclosure. In the spring it will emerge as an adult fly.
  - 23. A late fall visit to a local wetland can often provide a front-row seat to the secret lives of beavers and muskrats. Beavers are busy now cutting down trees to gather branches for their winter food cache – a big pile of mostly submerged vegetation beside the lodge. Muskrats occupy themselves building mounds of mud and cattails for winter shelter.

### BALD EAGLE INFLUX

- 24. Bald eagles from northern Ontario begin to arrive and bolster the ranks of our resident eagles. Jack Lake and Lake Katchewanooka are often good spots to see eagles.
- 25. Covered by millions of fallen leaves, the forest floor is hard at work as a gigantic recycling centre. In this, the last stage of the ecological cycle, dead organic matter is being softened, shredded, digested, and decomposed by countless billions of organisms into simpler compounds that can be reused by the forest's plant communities.
- 26. Walleye begin to move upstream along large rivers such as the Otonabee. They remain in the rivers over the course of the winter in anticipation of the early spring spawn.
- 27. Between 1971 and 2000, November's average daily high in Peterborough was 6 C and the minimum was -2 C. keep these numbers in mind when you listen to weather reports this month.
- 28. Coyotes are often heard in late fall. The coyotes of central Ontario are closely related to the eastern wolf (*Canis lycaon*). Consequently, the two species sometimes hybridize, a male wolf mating with a female coyote. All wolf-like animals of Peterborough County contain, to varying degrees, both coyote and eastern wolf genetic material.
- 29. If you're out wandering the woods, watch for clusters of small, fan-shaped fungi growing on logs or dead trees. If the fungus has concentric zones or rings of white, cream, yellow, and brown, you are probably looking at turkey tail fungus, one of our most attractive species.
- 30. The Pleiades (Seven Sisters) star cluster adorns the eastern sky, while Orion looms over the southeast. They both add interest to an evening's walk in late November.

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