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LIVING

A treat for all senses

In July, the warmest month, some shorebirds and even a few warbler species will actually begin to head south

The preparations and toil of spring begin to bear fruit in July. Eggs are now fledged birds; the early flowers have become ripe

berries; tadpoles have grown into small frogs; and the once-green roadsides are now a riot of colour and floral diversity.



OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Drew Monkman

July is a treat for all of our senses. Early in the month, the warm, humid air is replete with the sweet smell of milkweed and basswood flowers. Our palates, too, are well-served in

July as strawberries, raspberries, tomatoes and the first sweet corn become available. The serene, haunting song of the thrush gives beauty to early summer evenings, while the voices of bullfrogs and whip-poor-wills take over as darkness falls. Although the annual cycle of bird song is winding down now, an orchestra of insects is beginning to fill the void.

This, the warmest month of the year, brings hot, humid and thundery weather. Afternoons shake and tremble with intense thunderstorms whose gift of rain is often too short and violent to be of much benefit to the thirsty soil. The fact that the sun is rising and setting a little farther to the south each day largely goes unnoticed as we go about enjoying the summer weather. But, like a cruel joke, some shorebirds and even a few warbler species will actually begin to head south this month. And so the wheel of the year continues to turn, allowing us very little time to simply sit back and admire the fresh, new world around us.

The following almanac provides an overview of the events in our flora, fauna, weather and sky that are typical of July. The dates, of course, can change somewhat from one year to the next, depending on the vagaries of the weather. The general order of events should remain the same, however. The box in front of each date can be used to check off the events that you witness.

- **1** Starlings and crows flock up and roost in huge, noisy swarms. The birds are particularly loud in the evening, when they move to roosting sites.
- **2** Ox-eye daisies dominate roadsides in early July, accompanied by other non-native species such as purple vetch, orange hawkweed and viper's-bugloss.
- **3** Baby striped skunks, groundhogs, red foxes and raccoons are often seen along roadsides, in campgrounds and even in suburban backyards.
- **4** Common milkweed flowers, and its rich, sweet scent fills the early summer air.
- **5** Several species of orchids bloom, including rose pogonia, a wetland plant.
- **6** Bird song becomes noticeably muted by early July. Mates have been found, claims to territory settled and many young already fledged.



Terry Carpenter, special to The Examiner

□ **7** The crimson berries of the red-berried elder mature and are usually gobbled up by hungry birds within a week or so.

□ **8** The buzzy, electric song of the cicada starts to fill the void left by the decrease in daytime bird song. Some people know them as heat-bugs.

□ **9** Veeries, wood thrushes and hermit thrushes still sing their clear, serene songs on early summer evenings. Unfortunately, one voice, the echoing call of the whip-poor-will, has become much less common.

□ **10** Roadkill on our highways is very noticeable. The carnage is partly due to the large number of young mammals which must range widely in search of food and/or a new territory.

□ **11** Family groups of common mergansers are often seen feeding and traveling along shorelines on lakes in the northern Kawarthas. Broods of mergansers sometimes combine, and it is not uncommon to see a female with a parade of more than 20 young in tow.

□ **12** Basswood trees flower and attract a multitude of bees which feed heavily on the tree's nectar and pollen. The basswood's gentle fragrance is transferred to the bees' honey and wax.

□ **13** Caspian terns start showing up on our larger lakes. Most of these birds are slowly making their way from Lake Huron breeding colonies down to Lake Ontario.

□ **14** White sweet clover reigns supreme along roadsides in mid-July. Also watch for Queen Anne's lace, black-eyed Susan and various cinquefoils and St. John's-worts.



□ **15** Swallows start congregating on telephone wires, especially in the vicinity of farms.

□ **16** The Summer Triangle and Milky Way dominate the night sky. The Milky Way is best seen from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m.

□ **17** The first southward-bound semipalmated sandpipers, pectoral sandpipers and greater yellowlegs begin to pass through. They are most easily seen at Presqu'île Provincial Park.

□ **18** Purple loosestrife blooms prolifically. Loosestrife infestations lead to a reduction in native plant communities and the wildlife that depends on them.

□ **19** Fritillary, hairstreak and skipper butterflies are the stars of the butterfly show this month.

□ **20** A wide variety of dragonflies and damselflies is on the wing in July. Among the most common are the beaverpond baskettail, the dot-tailed whiteface and the chalk-fronted skimmer.

□ **21** Although the days are growing shorter, sunset (8:50 p.m.) is only about 10 minutes earlier now than it was at the summer solstice in June. Sunrise (5:49 a.m.) is 20 minutes later.

□ **22** This is our warmest month, with hot, humid and often thundery weather. July is therefore prime lightning season. Almost three-quarters of lightning strikes occur between noon and 6 p.m.

□ **23** Deer flies and horse flies are very common in July. Deer flies can be identified by their black-spotted wings and their habit of persistently buzzing around your head.

□ **24** Queen Anne's lace (wild carrot) has taken over as the predominant roadside flower. Other common species right now include bouncing bet, smooth hawk's-beard, fireweed and various thistles and knapweeds.

□ **25** The branches of cherries, honeysuckles and dogwoods bow over with ripe berries.

A chalk-fronted skimmer (above). This dragonfly is sometimes called 'the corporal' because of its military-style shoulder stripes. Look for it near marshy lakes and wetlands. At left, a viceroy butterfly feeds on the abundant nectar of purple loosestrife. The viceroy mimics the evil-tasting monarch in appearance as a means of protection from enemies.

floor from July through September.

□ **27** Being opposite the high-riding summer sun, the summer moon travels low in the southern sky. This means that summer moon shadows are much longer than those of winter.

□ **28** Young ospreys leave the nest in late July or early August but return for feeding and roosting for about seven days.

□ **29** By month's end, farmers are harvesting winter wheat. Local sweet corn and tomatoes are usually available as well.

□ **30** Green frogs and bullfrogs call until late July or early August, when the amphibian chorus finally comes to an end.

□ **31** Pegasus, the signature constellation of fall, becomes visible along the northeastern horizon in the late evening. Along with July's migrating shorebirds, the arrival of Pegasus reminds us to enjoy summer now because it won't last!

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