

EDITOR: ROB McCORMICK
745-4641 ext. 244
fax 743-4581
life@peterboroughexaminer.com

LIVING

Summer's height

July, the seventh month of the year in the Gregorian calendar, represents summer at its height. It is our warmest month, with hot, humid and often thundery weather. Roadside flowers are at their most colourful



OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Drew Monkman

The scent of milkweed and basswood flowers fills the air as cicadas buzz in the background. Many bird voices, however, fall silent this month and won't be heard again until next spring. Blackbirds and swallows flock up and, as a cruel reminder of time's relentless march forward, the first southward-bound shorebirds start to pass through.

July was named in honour of Julius Caesar, who was born in this month. The

Anglo Saxons called the month, Moedmonad, or Mead-month, from the meadows being then in bloom. Similarly, in Finnish, July is called heinakuu, meaning "month of grass." Astronomically speaking, the sun begins the month in the constellation of Gemini and ends in the constellation of Cancer.

The following almanac provides an overview of some of the events in our flora, fauna, weather and sky that are typical of July in the Kawarthas. The dates, however, are only an approximation and depend on the vagaries of the weather. You may wish to use the box in front of each date to check off those events you witness yourself.

□ **1** Having completed their nesting duties, starlings, red-winged blackbirds, common grackles and American crows reform flocks.

□ **2** Ox-eye daisies dominate roadsides in early July and are accompanied by other non-native wildflowers such as birdsfoot trefoil, chicory, orange hawkweed and viper's-bugloss.

□ **3** Bears sometimes come into rural neighbourhoods in search of food. Spring and early summer is a time of relative food scarcity for bears. In fact, they tend to lose weight during this period. They will therefore take advantage of any protein- or fat-rich foods available. This often means eating garbage. Most shrub and tree-borne fruit and nuts won't become available until mid July.

□ **4** Common milkweed is in flower, and its rich, sweet scent fills the early summer air. Milkweed gets its name from the white, sticky, bitter liquid that protects the plant from most herbivores. Watch, however, for monarch butterfly caterpillars which eat nothing other than milkweed leaves.

□ **5** Skippers, very small butterflies that get their name from their fast, erratic style of flight, are probably the most abundant butterflies of all in July. Watch especially for the European skipper, a species common on wildflowers in fields and along roadsides. It is easily identified by its yellow gold wings.

□ **6** Cedar waxwings nest any time between late June and early August as berry crops, their main source of food, begin to ripen. In late June and early July, reddish-purple serviceberries are a common source of food.

□ **7** Wetlands come alive with blooming elderberry, swamp milkweed, white water lily and, by mid-month, jewelweed, Joe-Pye-weed and purple loosestrife.

□ **8** As the nesting seasons wraps up, there is a marked decrease in bird song. However, the buzzy, electric song of the cicada starts to fill the void. More than anything else, the cicada's monotonous, energy-sapping buzz means that high summer has arrived.

□ **9** Cottage roads can be great for birding in summer. Watch especially for trees and shrubs with ripe fruit where birds may be feeding. Right now is also a good time to see family groups of warblers, since most young have now left the nest but are still being fed by the parents. If you hear call notes, stop and "pish." You'll be amazed at the reaction you'll get.

Some events in July cruel reminders of time's relentless march forward



Terry Carpenter, special to The Examiner

July is a wonderful month for butterfly watching. Red admirals (above left) appear to be relatively common this summer. The various species of fritillaries, such as the Atlantis fritillary (inset photo) are among our most beautiful butterflies.

□ **10** The carnage on our highways is very noticeable — birds, mammals, turtles, snakes, frogs and monarch butterflies pay the price for our automobile-crazed society. However, simply slowing down is often enough to avoid many collisions with wildlife. It's that simple.

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

□ **12** The basswood is the last of our native trees to blossom. Its large, heart-shaped leaves make it an easy species to identify. Basswood flowers are extremely fragrant and full of nectar. They therefore attract hordes of bees and other insects who together produce a huge humming sound as the tree literally vibrates with life.

□ **13** Most frog song now is but a memory of spring. However, the plucking sound of the green frog, often compared to the twang of a loose banjo string, along with the "jug-of-rum" call of the bullfrog, can still be heard on midsummer nights.

□ **14** White sweet clover reigns supreme along roadsides in mid-July. They are biennials and grow to over four feet tall in their second year. Tiny, white flowers form on long clusters at the top of the stem. At one time this plant was widely used on dairy farms for pasturage and hay.

□ **15** Signs of the changing season are already upon us as swallows start congregating on roadside wires, especially in the vicinity of farms. The flocks gather until hundreds of birds fill the gaps between the poles. Tree and barn swallows are the dominate species.

□ **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. It is brightest near the southeastern horizon in the constellation Sagittarius.

□ **17** The first southward-bound shorebirds

begin to pass through. Semipalmated sandpipers, pectoral sandpipers and greater yellowlegs are usually the most common species. Presqu'ile Provincial Park offers our area's best shorebird-watching opportunities, especially from late July through September.

□ **18** Purple loosestrife blooms prolifically. This hardy perennial rapidly spreads into monocultures which degrade wetlands and diminish their value as wildlife habitat.

□ **19** July is a great time to take a break from watching birds and to focus on learning our many species of butterflies. Some of the stars of the butterfly show this month include the dun skipper, European skipper, great spangled fritillary, Atlantis fritillary, red admiral, northern pearly-eye, and, of course, the monarch. So far, 2007 appears to be another bumper year for monarchs.

□ **20** Identifying and photographing dragonflies is also a wonderful way to spend a summer afternoon. Many species can be identified with the naked eye or with binoculars. However, if you are unsure of a dragonfly's identity, try taking a picture with a digital camera and then use the digital zoom feature to get a close-up look at the various field marks. Among the most common species in July are the dot-tailed whiteface, common whitetail, four-spotted skimmer, and chalk-fronted skipper.

□ **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** Local lakes reach their warmest temperatures this month. The average is about 23 C. This warm water sits on top of much colder water, thereby creating two "separate" lakes which do not mix.

□ **23** Deer flies, along with their larger cousins, the horse flies, are very common throughout July. Deer flies can be identified by their black-spotted wings and their habit of persistently buzzing around your head. Horseflies bite ankles and legs rather than

heads.

□ **24** Queen Anne's lace, also known as wild carrot, takes over as the predominant roadside flower in late July. 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. This is also blueberry time in northern Peterborough County.

□ **26** Salamanders such as the blue-spotted occasionally resurface from their subterranean retreats on rainy nights and can be seen crossing roads.

□ **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** If you are out in the early morning, watch for dew droplets sparkling on the leaves of jewelweed, hence the name. The orange flowers hanging from the stem attract hummingbirds and bumblebees. Later, when the seeds are ripe, the inch-long pods explode when touched, scattering seeds in every direction. This explains the plant's other common name of touch-me-not.

□ **29** Watch for the orange sulphur butterfly in fields of alfalfa. Alfalfa is often grown for hay and offers a variety of floral colours including deep purple.

□ **30** The ghostly-white Indian pipe blooms in the heavy shade of hardwood forests.

□ **31** Pegasus, the signature constellation of fall, becomes visible along the northeastern horizon in the late evening. It reminds us to enjoy summer now because it won't last.

Drew Monkman is a Peterborough teacher and author of Nature's Year in the Kawarthas. He can be reached at dmonkman1@cogeco.ca. Terry Carpenter is an award-winning local nature photographer. Go to www3.sympatico.ca/terrycarpenter/ to see more of his photographs and to contact him.