

# localnews

www.peterboroughexaminer.com

Editor JIM HENDRY life@peterboroughexaminer.com 745-4641 ext. 242

## LIVING

# It's hot, and nature is early

## Flowers in bloom, butterflies back well ahead of standard schedule

"Live in each season as it passes: breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit."

Henry David Thoreau

As with each month of the year, I will once again provide an overview of some of the events in our flora, fauna, weather and sky that are typical of the month at hand. However, as climate change continues to make itself felt – consider the record warmth we had this past winter and spring – many events are happening earlier than usual. Just to give a couple of examples, this is the first time I've ever seen purple coneflower in bloom in June, a full two or three weeks ahead of schedule. Likewise, Jerry Ball, a local butterfly expert, reports record-early sightings of no less than 48 species so far this year.



Drew Monkman

OUR CHANGING SEASONS



DREW MONKMAN photo

Clockwise from top: Firefly in flower, a cardinal flower, and the common whitetail.



Wikipedia Commons



- **1** Having completed their nesting duties, starlings, red-winged blackbirds, common grackles and American crows reform flocks. Flocking provides many advantages to birds such as protection. When the flock is feeding, it only takes a few individuals to watch for enemies. This allows the other birds in the flock to spend their time feeding and preening rather than having to constantly look out for danger.

- **2** Ox-eye daisies usually dominate roadsides in early July. They are accompanied by other non-native wildflowers such as birdsfoot trefoil, chicory, orange hawkweed and viper's-bugloss. However, this year, many roadsides have already been taken over by Queen Anne's lace and white sweet clover, two species that usually flower later in the month.

- **3** If you're out for an early morning walk alongside a wetland, watch for large, circular spider webs called orbs. Constructed vertically to the ground, a big orb web can be two feet in diameter and have 15 or more "spokes" reaching to the hub where the owner usually sits. Many different species of orb-weaver spiders exist. Dew-covered webs in the morning can make for great photographs.

- **4** Common milkweed is in flower, and its rich, sweet scent fills the early summer air. Watch for monarch butterfly caterpillars on the leaves. They are striped in black, white and yellow. The number of monarchs reported so far this year appears quite encouraging, especially in light of the heavy die-off they experienced on their Mexican wintering grounds as a result of freak weather events. I am presently seeing about six monarchs a day in west-end Peterborough.

### SKIPPERS ABOUND

- **5** Tiny, moth-like butterflies called skippers are by far the most abundant butterflies this month. They get their name from their fast, erratic style of flight. Watch especially for the European skipper which is easily identified by its brassy, burnt-orange wings. It is usually very common in open grassy places with scattered flowers. Many other similar skipper species can also be seen right now, particularly on the margins of wetlands where flowers abound.

- **6** American goldfinches breed later than most other birds in the Kawarthas. They usually wait until sometime in late

June or early July when thistles have produced their downy seeds. Not only is thistle down used to line the nest but regurgitated thistle seeds are also fed to the young.

- **7** Wetlands are alive now with blooming elderberry, swamp milkweed, white water lily, Joe-Pye-weed, purple loosestrife and, by mid-month, jewelweed. Watch also for tall meadow rue in the same habitat. Growing up to six feet tall, the male plant's flowers have numerous, white, thread-like stamens which make the plant look like it's covered with fuzzy balls.

- **8** The buzzy, electric song of the cicada is now filling the void created by the decrease in bird song. Drum-like organs in the near-hollow abdomen vibrate to create the sound. On hot days, males do their best to attract silent females with this signature sound of summer.

- **9** Cottage roads can be surprisingly good for birding in July and August. Look for trees and shrubs with ripe fruit where birds may be feeding. If you hear call notes, stop and "pish." You'll be amazed at all of the birds – including many recently-fledged young – that will pop up to see what the strange noise is. Most will probably be warblers.

- **10** There is more to the black-eyed Susan flower than meets the eye – the human eye that is. The ultraviolet vision range of bees sees the yellow petals of the flower as three concentric bull's eye rings surrounding the brown center. This pattern serves as a guide to lead the bees to their reward of nectar and

pollen in the central disk flowers.

- **11** Family groups of common mergansers are often seen feeding and traveling along shorelines on lakes in the northern Kawarthas. The mother protects the chicks, but she does not feed them. They dive to catch all of their own food.

- **12** With the abundant precipitation we had during June, mushrooms should start to be quite common. Watch especially for boletes. Although they are the same size and shape as other mushrooms, they have no gills under the cap, but rather an underside surface full of tiny pores. It's fun to make mushroom spore prints with boletes. Go to: [http://www.mushroomexpert.com/spore\\_print.html](http://www.mushroomexpert.com/spore_print.html) for instructions.

### BANJO FROG

- **13** The ear-splitting chorus of spring peepers and gray treefrogs has now been replaced by the lazy, laid-back calls of the green frog. Named for the green colour that usually appears on the head or face, this species produces a plucking sound that is remarkably like the twang of a loose banjo string. Green frogs are most vocal at dusk and dawn.

- **14** As the nesting seasons wraps up; there is a marked decrease in bird song. It's easy to forget that the primary reason for song is that males want to advertise themselves, be it to declare ownership of territory or to attract a mate. Singing requires a huge amount of energy, so if there is no reproductive imperative to do so, it's to a bird's

advantage to remain quiet.

- **15** Signs of the changing season are already upon us as swallows start congregating on roadside wires, especially in the vicinity of farms. Only ten years ago, these flocks used to number in the hundreds of birds with tree and barn swallows dominating.

- **16** Along cottage roads, watch for thickets of purple-flowering raspberry. A small shrub, it has maple-like leaves and rose-purple flowers about 3 – 5 cm across. The raspberry-like fruits have a nice flavour but tend to be extremely seedy. This species also makes a nice addition to a native wildflower garden.

- **17** The first southward-bound shorebirds begin to pass through. Watch especially for semipalmated sandpipers, pectoral sandpipers and greater yellowlegs. Presqu'île Provincial Park offers our area's best shorebird-watching opportunities.

- **18** Watch for the uncommon map turtle basking on rocks in larger lakes such as Stony. They often do their sun-bathing piled one on top of the other!

- **19** July is a great time to take a break from birding and to turn your attention to our many species of butterflies. Among the most common July species are the European skipper, Dun skipper, eyed brown, northern pearly-eye, clouded sulphur, cabbage white, great spangled fritillary, northern crescent, white admiral, red admiral, and, of course, the monarch. Close-focusing binoculars and a guide book are a must.

You can take a picture of the butterfly with your digital camera and then use the zoom feature to get a close-up look at the various field marks. A good website for butterfly identification is at <http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org>

- **20** Identifying and photographing dragonflies is also a wonderful way to spend a summer afternoon. You should have no trouble finding the dot-tailed whiteface, common whitetail, four-spotted skimmer, and chalk-fronted skipper. Go to <http://www.odonatacentral.org> for pictures of all the North American dragonflies and damselflies.

- **21** The days are slowly 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 just 20 minutes later.

- **22** Local lakes reach their warmest temperatures this month. The average is about 23C. This warm water sits on top of much colder water that remains at 4C all summer long, thereby creating two "separate lakes" which do not mix.

- **23** Deer flies are very common throughout July. Slightly larger than house flies, they are mostly yellow or black with dark markings on the wings. They have brilliant green or golden eyes. Deer flies persistently buzz around your head until they decide to land and dine!

- **24** Solitary sandpipers are now passing through the Kawarthas after completing nesting duties in the far north. As its name implies, this species is always found alone, often along the edge of small wetlands.

### GORGING ON BERRIES

- **25** The branches of cherries, honeysuckles and dogwoods bow over with ripe berries. Many bird and mammal species gorge themselves accordingly.

- **26** Being opposite the high-riding summer sun, the summer moon is always low in the sky. This means that summer moon shadows are much longer than those of winter. The low moon also makes for romantic, long moonbeams over the water.

- **27** The margins of shallow bays turn purple in late July and early August when pickerel weed flowers. It is thought that the name "pickerelweed" comes from the fact that this plant shares its shallow-water habitat with the fish of the same name.

- **28** If you are out in the early morning, watch for dew droplets sparkling on the leaves of jewelweed, hence the name. 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** The Summer Triangle and Milky Way dominate the night sky. As for the Big Dipper, it is suspended high in the northwest. The two stars that form the handle-end of the Dipper's bowl point almost directly to Vega, the brightest star of the Triangle.

- **30** If you're lucky, you may find scarlet cardinal flowers in bloom along lakeshores and the margins of wetlands. They are highly sought by nectar-loving hummingbirds.

- **31** According to the Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska, there is a fair chance of northern lights over southern Canada this summer as a result of an increasingly active sun. Look to the north for a shimmering greenish or white glow.

Drew Monkman is a Peterborough teacher and author of *Nature's Year in the Kawarthas*. He can be reached at [dmonkman1@cogeco.ca](mailto:dmonkman1@cogeco.ca). Visit his website and see past columns at [www.drew-monkman.com](http://www.drew-monkman.com).