

localnews

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LIVING

October brings nature's glow

Burnished yellows and reds against pale blue sky in soft, dreamy light

*"Just before the death of flowers,
And before they are buried in snow,
There comes a festival season
When nature is all aglow."
- Author Unknown*

It's hard to know where to begin when describing all that's wonderful about October. Blazing colour, of course, comes to mind first; but there is much more. Blue skies, dreamy light, cool but comfortable temperatures, busy birdfeeders, the scent of the fallen leaves, crisp nights, family get-togethers at Thanksgiving, and children's wonder at the magic of Halloween are but a sampling. Hopefully, by observing some of the plants, animals and other events in nature listed in this October almanac, your enjoyment of the month will be all the greater.



Drew Monkman

OUR CHANGING SEASONS



Signs of October in the Kawarthas include (clockwise from top left) the northern saw-whet owl, blackberry leaves on the forest floor and the white-crowned sparrow.

KARL EGRESSY Special to The Examiner



DREW MONKMAN, Special to The Examiner



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• 1 On an average year, fall colours in the Kawarthas reach their height at about Thanksgiving. As of Sept. 24, the Ontario Travel Centre was reporting about a 20% colour change in our area. County Rd. 45 from Norland to Kinmount makes for a great colour drive, as does Hwy. 35 north to Huntsville.

• 2 Sparrow migration takes centre stage this month, making early October one of the busiest times of the year for backyard feeders. While resident birds like chickadees and nuthatches are busy caching sunflower seeds for future retrieval, migrants such as white-throated sparrows are filling up for their long trip south.

• 3 Coyotes are quite vocal throughout the fall and can often be heard calling at night right on the edge of Peterborough. Several neighbours report having seen coyotes on Maple Cres. in the city's west end this summer.

• 4 As the goldenrods quickly fade away, asters dominate (and conclude!) the wildflower show this month. The generally white flowers of heath and calico asters, along with the purple or mauve blossoms of New England and purple-stemmed asters, seem to be everywhere. Go to ontariowildflowers.com for excellent tips on identifying asters.

• 5 This is usually the month of the first killing frosts and the first strenuous scraping of the car windshield. With climate change asserting itself so strongly this year, however, who knows when the first frost will be.

• 6 Jupiter is rising in the east this month, just as the Sun is going down. Its four main moons are visible with even 10x50 binoculars if they can be held steady enough. Later in the evening, watch for Jupiter high in the east-southeast. It is by far the brightest star-like object in the sky.

• 7 Watch and listen for mixed flocks of golden-crowned and ruby-crowned kinglets, brown creepers, dark-eyed juncos, white-throated sparrows, and yellow-rumped warblers. Our local rail-trails are a great place to see these birds.

• 8 Cluster flies can sometimes be abundant in October. They are bigger than houseflies and have light hairs on their backs. Right now, they are looking for cracks and crannies in buildings in which to overwinter. If they make it inside, however, their habitat of buzzing against windows can become quite irritating! Fortunately, they are not inter-

ested in your food.

• 9 To make a nice winter bouquet pick some stems of pearly everlasting and add them to an arrangement of other dried flowers - or display them simply by themselves. This whitish perennial of the Canadian Shield does not wilt after being picked, hence the name.

• 10 The signature constellation of fall is Pegasus and its asterism, the Great Square. Adjacent to the square is the Andromeda constellation and the Andromeda galaxy. Our closest galactic neighbour, it appears through binoculars like a faint oval of fuzzy light - light that left the galaxy two million years ago! Go to Wikihow.com for detailed steps for finding Andromeda.

• 11 One of the things I love most about October is the often hazy, dream-like quality of the light. With the sun being lower in the sky, the angle of the light is shallower and, to my eyes at least, everything appears softer. On days with high humidity there is almost a feeling of reverie.

• 12 Flocks of giant Canada geese (the subspecies that nests in the Kawarthas), ring-billed gulls, red-winged blackbirds, American crows, and American robins

are widespread.

• 13 A buck white-tailed deer will use its antlers to make scrapes in the leaf litter on the forest floor in preparation for the upcoming rut. It then urinates on its hind legs in such a way that the urine runs over special "hock" glands and carries the scent down to the scrape. Female deer visit these scrapes.

• 14 On balmy October days, ruffed grouse can sometimes be heard drumming. It is thought that these birds are mostly young males attempting to establish their own territories. Early fall is also the grouse's "hock" season. Young birds disperse from their parent's territory and often end up colliding with all manner of objects. A reader in Millbrook told me that for three years in a row a grouse flew into the same screen door of his farmhouse!

• 15 Northern saw-whet owls are migrating through the area. A research study at Trent University is trying to find out more about their habitat use and migration patterns. Fine netting is set up at night in a diamond pattern, with a tape recorder in the middle playing saw-whet owl calls. Any birds caught are untangled, weighed, measured and banded.

• 16 Mid- through late October is very much a time of yellows. Most of the colour is being supplied courtesy of trembling aspen, bigtooth aspen, balsam poplar, silver maple, white birch, and, at month's end, tamarack.

• 17 Indian Summer usually occurs sometime in October in the Kawarthas. The term refers to a period of three or more warm, sunny days after the first hard frost (-2 C).

• 18 If you come across a mosquito this month, don't be overly surprised. Mosquitoes of the genus *Culex* are still somewhat active, albeit in small numbers. These mosquitoes overwinter as adults in subterranean structures such as basements and sewers. *Culex pipiens* is known to carry West Nile Virus.

• 19 Spring peepers are often heard calling during the day from the forest habits they call home outside of the breeding season. They are most vocal on warm, damp days.

• 20 Comet Hartley 2 will make its closest approach to Earth about now. It should be visible with the naked eye in the early morning sky for a few days. Look to the east just before sunrise. The further you can get from city lights, the better.

• 21 Common redpolls are expected to turn up in good numbers this winter. Their winter food of choice is birch seeds. The birch seed crop is poor in northern Canada but quite good in central Ontario. Many of these birds will also make side trips to backyard niger feeders.

• 22 You can get a real sense right now of just how many of our city trees and shrubs are non-native and, therefore, still stubbornly green. Species such as Norway maple, lilac, weeping willow, and European buckthorn are still genetically tied to the day-length patterns of their native Eurasian bioregions.

• 23 This evening is the Hunter's Moon, namely the first full moon after the Harvest Moon. In the fall, the moon rises only about 30 minutes later from one night to the next - instead of the yearly average of about 50 minutes. This means that when the moon is full, or nearly full, there is no long period of darkness between sunset and moonrise. This allowed Native American hunters to hunt by autumn moonlight.

• 24 Migrating diving ducks stop over on our larger lakes such as Pigeon and Rice. Goldeneye, scaup and mergansers are most common. Scaup populations are declining, however. A potential cause is the disappearance of wetlands in the northern boreal forest where the birds nest. These wetland losses have been linked to climate change, which is thought to be melting the permafrost seal, which stops the water from draining into the soil.

• 25 The "fall turn-over" begins to re-oxygenate lakes this month. As the surface waters cool, they begin to mix with the uniformly cold lower layers. This brings oxygen to the depths and nutrients to the shallows.

• 26 Deer mice seek out winter accommodation and will often choose garages, sheds and even houses to spend the winter. Deer mice - and their droppings - carry the Hantavirus. Although rare, the virus is potentially deadly.

• 27 Rough-legged hawks that have just finished breeding in the Arctic tundra are now passing through the Kawarthas. This large hawk has both dark and light colour forms.

• 28 As a result of frost, most insect activity is usually pretty much finished by late October. Listen for the near-complete absence of insect sound.

• 29 Red squirrels in the fall spend a lot of time nipping off cone-bearing twigs on evergreens such as pines, spruces, hemlocks, and even cedar. These "nip twigs" are scattered all over the ground. The cones are removed and stored as winter food.

• 30 The smoky, golden-yellow of tamaracks is the final act in the annual fall pageant of tree colour. Watch for them along the edges of wetlands.

• 31 If you find a Halloween bat in your house, it is probably a big brown, a species that often overwinters in buildings. Little browns, on the other hand, choose caves and abandoned mines as winter quarters. Their population is in a free-fall as a result of White Nose Syndrome that has now been confirmed in Ontario.

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