

localnews

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LIVING

Time is not the only change

Change is abundant in trees, fish, wildlife and more in November

As we return to Standard Time on Sunday, the shortening days will seem even shorter. With the sun setting before 5 p.m., darkness will greet many people as they leave work. Granted, some of us find the loss of light a little depressing. For me, however, I am always fascinated by the decline in daylight in late fall – as I am by daylight's return in the spring – and always feel a strong spiritual connection to the cycle of the seasons at both these times of year. How wonderful it is to have such marked differences in daylight. It affects every aspect of nature. Compare this to the tropics where sunrise and sunset is always at the same time, all year-round. How boring!



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.

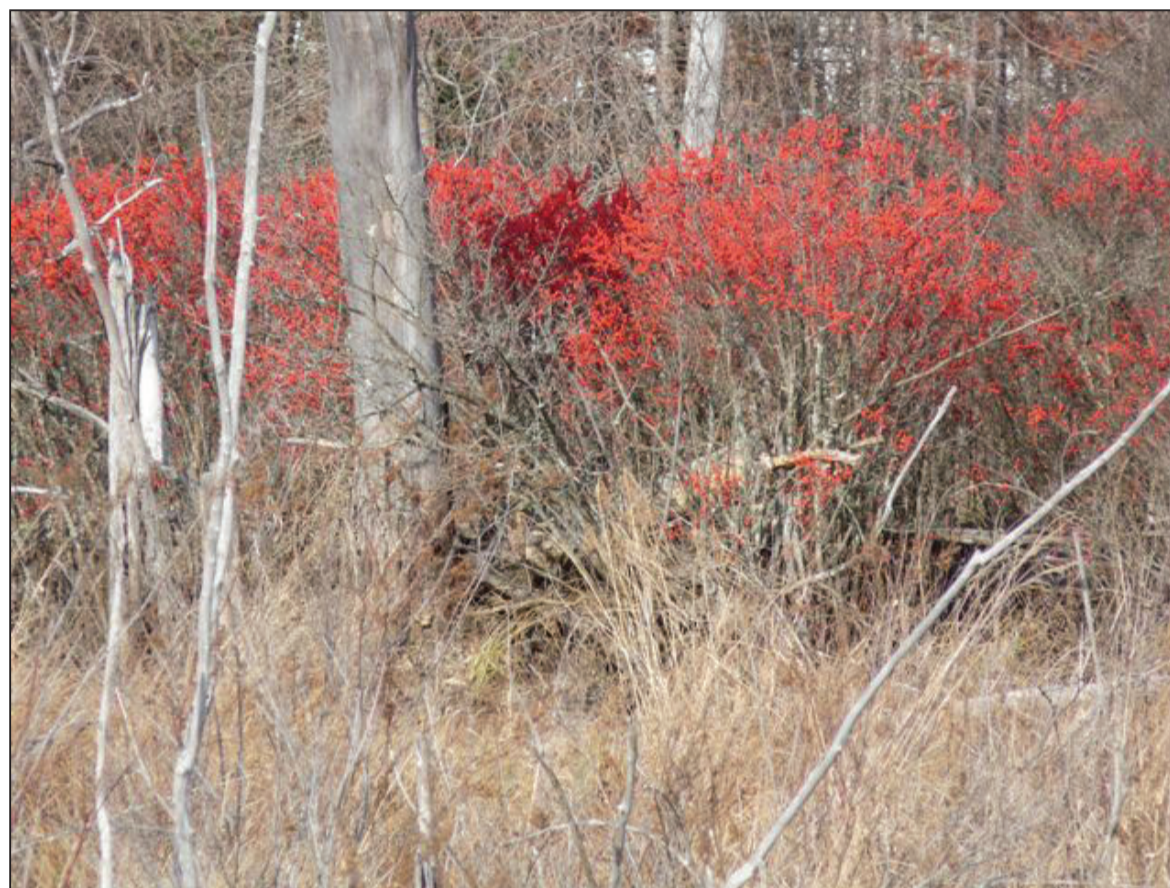
1. Oaks, tamaracks and silver maples are about the only native deciduous trees that may still retain their foliage in early November. Red oaks stand out with particular prominence with their brownish-orange to sometimes burgundy-coloured leaves. At quick glance you are able to see just how common oaks are in many areas.

2. Brightly-coloured brook trout are still spawning and a joy to watch. The reddish lower fins are particularly attractive with their black and white leading edges. The male's belly also becomes a magnificent deep red at this time of year. You can see spawning brook trout in a ditch-like tributary of Harper Creek, which runs along the edge of Rye Street in the south end of Peterborough. The creek originates from cold-water springs located behind the Nissan dealership and adjacent properties along Lansdowne Street. Despite all of the development in the area, this ancient brook trout population still manages to hang on. Although the fish are very small (most less than seven inches in length and far too small to eat), they do provide for excellent fish-watching opportunities. Hopefully, if more people know about these fish and the rich, biodiverse wetland habitat where the springs emerge, the area will receive better protection. This is especially important now with the planned widening of Rye Street and development within the Harper Creek watershed. Harper Creek is the only cold water trout stream which runs through a municipal area in Ontario. Please note that the fishing season for brook trout is now closed.

3. Feeder activity is slowing down now as migrant sparrows such as the white-throated sparrow have pretty much finished passing through the Kawarthas. However, large numbers of pine siskins are filling some of the void at many feeders.

4. We return to Standard Time today at 2 a.m. Turn your clocks back one hour. Sunrise will be at 6:55 a.m. and sunset at 4:58 p.m. for a total of only 10 hours and 3 minutes of daylight. This is one-third less daylight than the 15 and a half hours we enjoyed back in June!

5. Today marks the beginning of the



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Top: The red colour in wetland species like this winterberry holly add some colour to the November landscape.

Above: The belly of the spawning brook trout turns a vibrant red early in November.

Right: By the end of the month various fungi will appear on dead trees. If it has concentric circles or rings it's likely turkey tail fungus.



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annual deer harvest by rifle and shotgun. It will last for three weeks. The buck's antlers have matured and hardened now, and they are "in rut," or at the peak of their sexual readiness.

6. Most of our loons and robins head south. However, a small number of robins regularly overwinter in the southern Kawarthas, especially in years like this year when wild grape is plentiful.

7. More collisions involving deer take place in late October and November than in any other month. When driving at dusk or after dark, watch for dark shadows along the side of the road and the bright green reflection of the deer's eyes in your headlights. Slow down immediately. Deer are unpredictable when confronted with an automobile.

8. The red berries of wetland species like winterberry holly and high-bush cranberry provide some much-needed November colour.

9. Monarch butterflies are now arriving on their wintering grounds in tiny patches of Oyamel fir forest, high up in the mountains west of Mexico City. According to the latest research, they can thank their antennae for having steered them in the right direction. The monarch's antennae are more or less the equivalent of a global positioning sys-

tem in a car.

10. The November air is scented by damp, decomposing leaves on the forest floor. The smell of manure is often on the air, too, as farmers spread it on their fields in the fall.

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 small blocks of amphibian ice – in other words, a frogsicles! Surprisingly, the ice does not harm the animal because it forms in the body cavities outside of the cells. Glycerol, acting as an antifreeze, inhibits freezing within the frog's cells.

12. Turtles sink down into the mud at the bottom of lakes, rivers and wetlands for the winter. By extending their head and legs in an effort to expose as much skin as possible, they are able to take up dissolved oxygen from the water. Their physical lethargy and low body temperature reduces their resting metabolism to a point where their heartbeat can slow to less than one per cent of the summer rate.

13. During a walk in the woods, watch for the rich purple leaves of bunchberry, a member of the dogwood family.

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 is well worth the effort at this time of year. The lagoons are located on the south side of County Road 33, just south of the village off of River Road. 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. November provides great weather for walking. The crisp temperatures seem to put extra energy in your step and, with nearly all of the leaves down, the hills and valleys somehow appear bigger and quite different from only a few short weeks ago. They invite exploration.

17. In our woodlands, the only trees still clinging to remnants of their foliage are oaks and young American beech and ironwood (hornbeam).

18. Red-tailed hawks, mainly from the boreal forest of northern Canada, migrate south into the United States. On a good day, hundreds can be seen flying

along the north shore of Lake Ontario. Many central Ontario red-tails are resident birds, however, and don't migrate

19. Late fall through early spring is a popular time to cut down trees for firewood. Before you cut, however, remember that den trees (living trees with cavities), dead trees (snags), and fallen logs are essential features of healthy wildlife habitats – not only for woodlands, but also for wetlands, hedgerows, and lakeshores. They should be left alone.

20. 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.

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.

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. In the spring it will emerge as an adult fly.

23. Snowshoe hares have acquired their white winter coats, which provide important camouflage. However, because climate change often means less snow in late fall, hares are becoming easier prey for predators as they stand out as conspicuous white beacons against a background of brown leaves and gray tree trunks.

24. Bald eagles from northern Ontario begin to arrive and bolster the ranks of our resident eagles. Lake Katchewanooka and the Otonabee River are sometimes good spots to see eagles.

25. Most insects are now inactive and have entered a dormant phase called "diapause." Depending on the species, insects will enter diapause as an egg, larva, pupa or adult. Like many frog species, the insect's cells and tissues are protected by glycerol, a kind of natural, sweet-tasting antifreeze produced by the cells in the fall. Glycerol allows an insect's body fluids to drop well below freezing without freezing solid. Unlike "hibernation," a term used for vertebrates, there is no growth what so ever during diapause.

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. The Algonquian name for the November full moon – which occurs this evening – is the Beaver Moon. Beavers are indeed very active this month.

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, you are probably looking at turkey tail fungus.

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.

Drew Monkman is a retired Peterborough teacher and author of Nature's Year: Changing Seasons in Central and Eastern Ontario. He can be reached at dmonkman1@cogeco.ca. Visit his website and see past columns at www.drew-monkman.com