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LIVING

Summer shifts to slow-down

August is warm and inviting but nature's frantic hustle and bustle mellows out

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

Marcel Proust

The frantic plant growth and animal activity of spring and early summer have now been replaced by the languid atmosphere of maturity and calm that is so typical of August. But, despite the sunshine and warm weather, premonitions of fall can be easily found. Thoreau was right when he observed "how early in the year it begins to be late."



DREW MONKMAN

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

For many bird species, the annual southward migration begins this month, the first leaves will begin to change colour and roadsides will be transformed by a yellow surf of goldenrod. With nesting duties completed, bird song has mostly faded away. The avian chorus that poured down from the trees only scant weeks ago has now been replaced by a musical frenzy emanating from lawns, meadows and marshes as countless crickets and grasshoppers broadcast their sexual desire through buzzes and clicks of every description.

It is not just our eyes and ears that tell us August has arrived. Our sense of smell is piqued this month by the citrusy aroma of the green, leathery husks of walnut fruits and by the scent of rain on dry earth. Our taste buds tell us it is late summer with the long-awaited arrival of local sweet corn and tomatoes.

With late August comes the anticipation of bright, cool September weekends and the riot of colour that is just around the corner. In a cultural sense, August is much more the end of the year than is December; because, after Labour Day, our lives and routines essentially begin anew.

ALL MONTH

- Unlike June and July, we are now rapidly losing daylight. By month's end, the sun sets about 45 minutes earlier than it did on Aug. 1.

- Listen for the high-pitched "lisp-ing" calls of Cedar Waxwings, the harsh "jaaaay" screams of Blue Jays, the cawing of American Crows, and the "po-ta-to-chip" flight call of the American Goldfinch. One place to watch for waxwings is on the branches of dead trees along the River Road between Trent University and Lakefield. They sally out from these branches to catch insects on the wing.

- Eastern Chipmunks continue to be extremely vocal. They make an incessant, bird-like "chuck-chuck-chuck" sound whose purpose may be to advertise ownership of territory. A number of people have remarked on low chipmunk numbers this year.

- A large percentage of the insect music we here this month comes courtesy of crickets and katydids. For example, the soft, rhythmic "treet...treet...treet" of the Snowy Tree Cricket sounds like a gentle-voiced Spring Peeper. Its beautiful rhythmic pulsations actually provide a good estimate of air temperature. Watch and



Wikimedia photos

Among the signs of August's slower, ripper summer season are (clockwise from above) bright yellow golden rod, the colourful Meadowhawk Dragonfly, ripening Choke Cherries, and Eastern Chipmunks feasting on a harvest of nuts.

listen at bit.ly/18nGrJ3

- Cottagers sometimes find large, mysterious, jelly-like "blobs" attached to the dock or aquatic plants. They are formed by colonies of Bryozoa, a freshwater invertebrate. Looking somewhat like an egg mass, the clumps are clear, dense, and have distinct, repetitive patterns and markings on the outside. Bryozoa are like a freshwater coral in that the mass they form is actually a colony of thousands of zooids - roughly analogous to polyps in corals. Each tiny zooid has whorls of ciliated feeding tentacles that sway back in forth to catch plankton in the water.

- Ants are abundant this month, even on the granite rocks of the Canadian Shield. Most of these are formicine ants and are usually either black or black and red. There are no "red ants" or fire ants in Canada, other than an exotic species that has turned up in a handful of large cities.
- Small dragonflies known as Mead-



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owhawks abound. Mature males are red, while females and immature males are yellowish. They are common in suburban gardens.

- The electric, buzz saw song of the Dog-day Cicada is still a common sound all month long. The insect's name is appropriate because it seems to love hot, humid, "dog day" weather. Listen at bit.ly/12Kyh4a

- Many leaves now have a dusty, tattered look. The leaves of Norway, Silver, and Freeman's (Autumn Blaze) maples often develop black spots as a result of a fungal disease called Tar Spot. The overall health of the tree does not seem to be affected, however.

- Pale Corydalis blooms in pockets of soil on the granite rocks of the Canadian Shield all month long. The tube-shaped flowers are pink with yellow tips.
- The bladderworts, a group of

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aquatic plant with small pink or yellow flowers, are now in bloom in

local wetlands. There carrot-like leaves can be seen on or just below the surface of the water. Green sacks called bladders are scattered among the leaves' many branches.

- August is synonymous with trees and shrubs laden with seed and fruit. This year, there is an abundant crop on almost all species including maples, ashes, cherries, oaks and honeysuckles.

- Queen Anne's Lace continues to dominate roadsides but goldenrod numbers are increasing. The deep lavender of thistles, the bright yellow of Smooth Hawk's-beard and the pale pink of Bouncing Bet are also common sights along roads and trails.

- On the evening of Aug. 9, watch for the planet Venus. It can be seen five degrees above the waxing crescent moon in the western sky.

MID-AUGUST

- Aug. 12 is usually the peak of the annual Perseid meteor shower, but viewing can also be good a day before or after. The Peterborough Astronomical Association will be on Armour Hill the night of the 12th for a free public observing event with scopes and binoculars. We are fortunate this year because there will be no interference as a result of moonlight. The planet Saturn should also be visible about four degrees above the setting moon in the early evening.

- As long as there is sufficient rain and humidity, mid-August through most of September is usually the peak season for mushroom hunting.

- Ragweed is in full bloom and its pollen has hay fever sufferers cursing with every sneeze. Goldenrod, which relies on insects to spread its sticky, heavy pollen, is not the culprit. The small, green flowers of the ragweed, however, rely strictly on the wind to spread the ultra light, spike-covered pollen

grains. Research done by the U.S. Department of Agriculture has shown that over the past four or five decades the higher CO2 levels associated with global warming may have doubled the amount of pollen that ragweed is producing.

LATE AUGUST

- Songbird migration is in full swing, with numerous warblers, vireos and flycatchers moving through. These birds can easily be attracted by pishing. If you see or hear chickadees in late August, you can usually assume that migrants will be with them.

- Goldenrod reaches peak bloom at month's end and take over as the main roadside and field flowers. These plants

are veritable insect magnets, drawing in an amazing variety of species with their offerings of pollen and nectar. Milkweeds, too, can host interesting species. Sadly missing this year, however, are the caterpillars of the Monarch butterfly. Monarch numbers in Central Ontario are at record

low levels this summer.

- Colour change is already noticeable in some trees, shrubs and vines. Red Maples growing lake and wetland edges should already be showing splashes of red and burgundy. The leaves of some Staghorn Sumacs and Virginia Creepers, too, have usually begun to acquire their fall colours by now.

- Heavy morning mists, especially in valleys and over lakes, complement the beauty of the August sunrise. With longer nights and lower temperatures, the night air is cooler in August. Water vapour therefore condenses - and becomes visible - when it comes into contact with these cooler pockets of air. Coupled with the noticeably shorter days, they are yet another hint of impending autumn.

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