

A Look at the Season's Main Events

By Virginia Barlow

September

October

November

FIRST WEEK

Green darner dragonflies are migrating / Ospreys begin to move south / Moose are packing on the pounds in preparation for winter when they subsist mostly on bark and are sure to lose weight / White pine seeds are falling from their cones; most of the empty cones will fall during the winter / Some red-bellied snakes may still be giving birth to their seven or eight live young. In a month or so they all will head to hibernation sites well below the surface

Both male and female crickets sing. It's usually a welcome sound, except when they move indoors and go on and on and on / Mating season for moose centers around late September and early October / Barred owls and great horned owls do not migrate and they may hoot year-round; whenever the spirit moves them / The acorns being stored by gray squirrels might get stolen by blue jays or other gray squirrels. Both species have kleptoparasitic tendencies

Snowshoe hares and weasels are changing into their winter whites and praying for snow / Beaver activity is at an annual high as they prepare for winter. The dam will be repaired and maybe raised, the lodge must be patched up, and lots of food stashed in the bottom of the pond / Common snipe are hardy and will often stay in meadows until hard freezes force them to fly south / Most adult dragonflies have died or fled, but autumn meadow hawks might still be around

SECOND WEEK

Over the past 40 or so years the growing season here has increased by about two weeks. Variations from one year to the next are even greater, so be ready to get out the bed sheets if cold nights are predicted / Milkweed pods are opening and the seeds are flying off / Male spring peepers may be peeping, not from water as in spring, but from the woods. Day length and temperature are similar to their spring mating time and seem to trigger this "fall echo"

Pretty and tasty, white shaggy manes (*Coprinus comatus*) often appear on lawns. They are quick to turn black and gooey, sometimes before you can get a frying pan hot / White-throated sparrows are singing their spring song, but at this time of year they rarely get it quite right / Muskrats are building their winter lodges out of cattails and other aquatic vegetation. They will be out looking for food during warmish winter weather / Sugar maples are at peak color

Nov. 14: This full moon very nearly coincides with the moon's closest approach to earth. The last time such a "supermoon" was seen was in 1948. High tides will be high and low tides low / Meadow voles are still breeding and they may breed all through winter if there is good snow cover / Chipmunks will keep coming out if it is warm / Fishers are eating apples, berries, and nuts now. Their diet does not consist entirely of small mammals and house cats

THIRD WEEK

Praying mantises are depositing their Styrofoam-like egg masses around twigs / Nutritious beechnuts are falling from beech trees and will be eaten by many, many, many mammals and birds / Sensitive ferns will soon be killed by the first real frost – if there hasn't already been a real frost / Pokeweed's dark purple fruits definitely call attention to themselves. The plant is used medicinally for a wide range of ailments, but beware: all parts are toxic

Oct. 21-22: Orionid meteor shower peaks. These meteors are bright and may be visible despite the second-quarter moon. Look toward the constellation Orion / Woolly bear caterpillars are looking for a place to spend the winter. The ratio of black to brown does not foretell the severity of the coming winter, but it may tell something about the just-past spring and summer / Some tree sparrows are still around, but most other small migrants have headed out

Nov. 17-18: Peak of the Leonid meteor shower, but this year the moon will be just past full so meteors may be hard to see / The red berries of winterberry stay on the shrubs well into winter, which is good news for many birds, including robins and bluebirds / Caterpillars of the cecropia moth, the largest moth in North America, have spun huge brown cocoons that incorporate the twigs of the host tree. The cocoons turn gray and remain suspended all winter

FOURTH WEEK

Sept. 28: Mars will be within one degree of the Lagoon Nebula and anyone with a backyard telescope will be able to use Mars as a marker for finding this 4,000 light-year distant interstellar cloud / Some of this year's eastern newts are leaving the ponds where they were born to take up a terrestrial existence. They'll turn red and be called red efts during their several-year stay on land / This could be among the last chances to enjoy fall warblers

Ash and birch seeds stay on the trees well into winter, providing food for finches / Now that the leaves are down, owls are easier to find. Look for them in areas that have some pine or hemlock / White ash and box elder hold on to their winged seeds, which are often eaten by birds, especially crossbills, throughout the winter / Most raccoons by now have fattened up for the winter. They won't eat much during the winter, so they need a good coating of fat

Crabapple trees are sometimes loaded with waxwings. Bohemian and cedar waxwing adults can subsist entirely on fruit, thanks to a short intestine and a large liver / Green lacewings and cluster flies may winter inside your house, instead of seeking shelter under bark / Veeries, Swainson's thrushes, and gray-cheeked thrushes are wintering south of the border, but hermit thrushes stay in the southern U.S. / Birch seeds travel far if blown across crusted snow

These listings are from observations and reports in our home territory at about 1,000 feet in elevation in central Vermont and are approximate. Events may occur earlier or later, depending on your latitude, elevation – and the weather.