

# This Week in the Woods November: Week One

NOVEMBER: WEEK ONE



Knight's plume moss



Shy cosmet moth sign?



Dark-eyed junco



Pearly everlasting



Great blue heron



Pelt lichen



Brick top



Ground-cedar



Beech drop

**This Week in the Woods**, we've been noticing bright green **knight's plume moss**, growing atop old stumps and other dead wood. It's an exceptionally pretty feathermoss, with fern-like plumes that curl down at the tip. Here's a [link with a macro image of the plant](#) from the Ohio Moss & Lichen Association. And note to plant enthusiasts: the [Northern Forest Atlas](#) in New York offers a treasure trove of photo guides and keys, including "Mosses of the Northern Forest." Check it out!

If you look at a stand of cattails now you'll see that most of the pollinated female flowers (the things on top which look somewhat like hot dogs) have burst open and are well on their way to dispersing their seeds, each hoisted into the breeze by its own little wisp of fluff. However, here and there in a cattail patch, a pollinated flower has kept much or most of its fluff, even in heavy wind. The likely culprit for this failure to launch is the cattail moth, or **shy cosmet moth**. Its larvae fasten together the top of the cattail with insect silk. The larvae will spend the winter hidden in the fluff, feeding on the seeds. As John Eastman notes in *The Book of Swamp and Bog*, "Moth infested spikes fluff out and generally 'droop' from the stem, sagging like unkempt haymows." Here's a [blog post from Nature Manitoba](#) showing how chickadees prey on the larvae.

**Dark-eyed juncos** are common and highly adaptable birds, closely associated with boreal forests, although this time of year they often appear in big flocks on the lawn. They're on the hunt for seeds, their main food, and they're not shy about it. They'll come close to people, and will push past chickadees to get their share. Here's a [profile about them from the Boreal Songbird Initiative](#), and a [great Outside Story essay](#) about the complexity of bird migration patterns by Carolyn Lorié, who notes that the juncos that remain in northern New England through winter "tend be the birds that are behaviorally dominant – that is, they are able to secure a desirable territory, keeping competition at bay."

**Pearly everlasting** is a tough little wildflower, able to tolerate poor soils and dry conditions. You can still find patches of it holding onto its dry blooms, which makes it a good candidate for a November flower arrangement. Another point in its favor: it's a host plant for American lady and painted lady butterfly caterpillars. Here's a [profile from The Native Plant Trust](#).

On October 8, Harper the Heron, outfitted with a solar-powered GPS, took off from Chaleur Bay in Canada, flew 68 hours without stopping, and settled down in Cumberland Island, Georgia. We know this from the [Heron Observation Network of Maine](#), a group featured in our upcoming (Winter) issue of *Northern Woodlands* magazine. However, this past week, we were surprised to photograph another, perhaps less ambitious **great blue heron** (we'll call him Herbert) hunting in a local wetland. See the essay by Carolyn Lorié, cited above, about the complexity of migration (and how much it depends on food), and this [Outside Story essay by Susan Shea](#), which describes herons' unusual nesting behavior.

**Pelt lichen** (many species), also called dog lichen, typically have a leafy appearance, and some have colored fruiting bodies that appear on lobe edges. They're also speed demons...by lichen standards. According to Joe Walewski in *Lichen of the North Woods*, "Some species of Peltigera

can grow extremely fast...more than 20 millimeters a year.” Buckle your seat belts! Here’s a [photo gallery of pelt lichen species from iNaturalist.ca](#).

**Brick top** is a late-growing mushroom that grows in clusters on rotting hardwood, bringing a welcome pop of bright color in stick season. Here’s a [profile from across the pond](#), where the same species also goes by the name of “brick tuft.”

**Ground-cedar** often spreads by the roots, which is why you often find it growing in lines. This beautiful evergreen plant is part of the clubmoss clan. As [Edna Greig notes in this \*Outside Story\* article](#), clubmosses evolved over 390 million years ago, and towered over ancient forests. Here’s a [profile of southern ground-cedar](#) (the most common New England ground-cedar species) from The Native Plant Trust.

Finally, as snow dusts the forest floor, it’s a good time to find **beech drops**, which stand out against the white background. These are small, parasitic plants that live off the roots of beech trees, but don’t appear to do much damage to their hosts. Here’s a [post from the Carnegie Museum of Natural History](#) showing a pressing of a plant collected in 1884 and a photo of beech drops’ late summer flowers.

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