



The loon family on Highland Lake

Photo: Donna Baker-Hartwell

Andover Naturally

Nature Shifts Toward Fall

By Lee Carvalho
Beacon volunteer

Shorter days and cooler nights are familiar signs of the approaching fall equinox. On Thursday, September 22, the sun will cross the celestial equator and the Earth's axis of rotation will be perpendicular to an imaginary line drawn between the centers of the sun and Earth. While "equinox" means "equal night," our night and day on the 22nd won't be exactly the same length; because of our distance from the equator, they are only approximately equal.

Many animals respond to the seasonal changes by migrating. Monarch

butterflies that emerged in Andover fields are leaving on a journey of approximately two months and up to 3,000 miles to the Transvolcanic Mountains in central Mexico – a place these individual butterflies have never been! – where they will overwinter.

Broad-winged hawks, because they travel as far as Peru, are among the first raptors to leave our area. For over 35 years Campton resident Susan Fogelman maintained an official hawk watch site on Little Round Top in Bristol, recording hundreds of broad-wings on some days in mid- and late-September. While the site is no longer "official," you could

spend part of a day there and watch for broad-wings and other migratory species, including osprey, red-tailed hawks, kestrels, monarchs, and hummingbirds. Contact me at the e-mail address below for directions to Little Round Top.

Animals that don't migrate are beginning to prepare for colder weather here. Fall webworms are constructing larval silk webs in tree branches. These are often confused with the tent caterpillars that build their nests in the forks of branches in the spring. Notice that webworm nests surround the tips of tree branches. They consume the leaves at the tips and then enlarge the nest down the branch to extend their food supply.

Bears are building up their fat layer by climbing beech and oak trees and eating all the nuts and seeds in sight. American beavers show an increase in activity as they, too, are trying to add a good layer of fat. Their favorite food is the inner bark of poplars, willows, and alders. Look for worn paths and wood chips when you are near ponds.

Loons

Donna Baker-Hartwell reports that two loon chicks hatched on August 2 on the shore of the island in Highland Lake. New Hampshire Loon Preservation Committee (NHLPC) volunteer biologist Susie Burbidge writes, "In general, by week two (if not before) they are starting to make short dives. By week three, they start chasing their own fish but are not very successful in capturing them. Each week they spend

a little more time underwater, and by week eight they are capturing about 50% of their own fish."

Peter Agoos observed one of the chicks making short dives before it was one week old! Both chicks are growing and can now be found swimming and feeding anywhere in the lake. A bald eagle has been seen harassing the loon family, but so far the loons have been able to defend themselves. A third adult loon has also been visiting and so far has not been seen threatening the others.

The NHLPC has put up signs to caution boaters. Because the babies cannot dive deep enough or fast enough to protect themselves from motors, it is best to stay 150 to 200 feet from the loons. Many thanks to those lakeside dwellers who have been watching and reporting their observations.

Update, August 24: The Highland Lake loon babies are in fact the youngest in the state. No other loons have hatched since August 2.

On the night of August 24, volunteer loon biologists banded the two adult loons. A small metal band was placed on each loon's leg. This will help to determine if the same pair are returning each year, among other things.

The biologists went out on the lake in the middle of the night when the loons were sleeping and netted the adult loons one at a time. A cloth sack was placed over their heads to keep them calm. The banding takes only a few minutes. We are told that this process does not hurt the loons.

Fall Flora

Goldenrod and asters provide color along roads and in fields during September. Notice that many goldenrod stalks have a spherical growth along their stems. According to Mary Holland in *Naturally Curious*, that gall starts to grow in early summer, several weeks after the gall fly bores a hole in the stem and lays its eggs. The larva inside eats the interior walls, making a small cavity where it grows.

As temperatures drop, the larva produces glycerol, which prevents its cells from freezing, and the larva remains dormant for the entire winter. The following spring it pupates and eventually the adult crawls out of the gall and leaves its "house" for the first time in a year!

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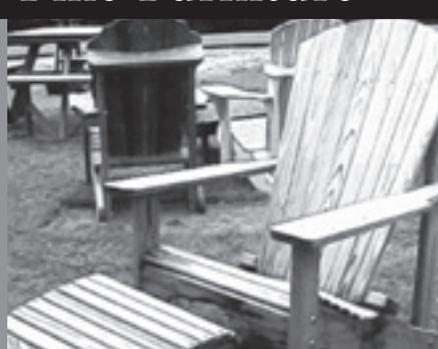
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