

Step Outside: Your Guide to Nature's Events

Nature Guides

Spectacular Salmon Struggle

Late September 2011

Featured Species: Atlantic and Pacific Salmon

Late September means one of the most impressive fish migrations, that of mature [salmon and trout](#) moving up rivers and small streams from Lakes Ontario and Huron to spawn. Most of the fish are currently staging, milling around stream and river mouths, waiting for water temperatures to cool and a good rain upstream to send them on their way.

[Coho](#) and [Chinook](#) Salmon from the Pacific were brought into the Great Lakes originally to provide additional fishing opportunities for anglers. More recently they have served to replace [Lake Trout](#) as [keystone predators](#), after Lake Trout populations crashed as a result of over fishing and [Sea Lamprey](#) predation. The non-native salmon have thrived in the lakes, creating a multi-million dollar sport fishery in the process. Most Pacifics are born and raised in hatcheries and then released into streams, but there is some evidence for natural reproduction as well.

[Atlantic Salmon](#), on the other hand, were once the native kings of Lake Ontario, but, as a result of habitat loss and over fishing, disappeared before 1900. Currently, there is an Atlantic Salmon [reintroduction program](#), which is beginning to show some success in specific streams, including the Credit River. For a small fee, you can even [adopt](#) a fish (or a school for your school)! Your class may want to watch the eggs hatch and [develop](#) right in the classroom, and then [release](#) them to native tributaries through the [Lake Ontario Classroom Hatchery Program](#).

In the Credit, most Pacifics don't make it upstream past the Streetsville [Dam](#), where they are harvested for eggs and sperm (Pacifics die after spawning). Other species moving through the [fish ladder](#) there include Atlantic Salmon, [Brown Trout](#) and [Steelhead](#), a lake resident, river-running form of [Rainbow Trout](#). The walk bridge in [Erindale Park](#), Mississauga (near Dundas St. and Mississauga Rd.), is another good site to view migrating fish. Check with a local angling club for good observation spots in your area.

Other Happenings:

- This year, MNR's [Kids' Fish Art Contest](#) features American Eel and Brown Trout. Learn about and draw one or both of these fish and win cool prizes!
- The end of the flowering plant season is heralded by [Heath Aster](#), a white-flowered aster with tiny leaves. It is one of our last flowering plants.
- [White-crowned Sparrows](#) and [Dark-eyed Juncos](#) have joined the [White-throated Sparrows](#) under backyard feeders. The sparrows can be hard to tell apart, as both can have either white or tan crowns. Look for a tuft of yellow above the eye of the White-throated, and a definite white throat patch. Some Juncos may spend all or part of the winter in southern Ontario.
- [Osprey](#) are departing on migration, and will fly over resident populations in the southern U.S. to winter in Central and South America.

Top R4R Picks

Resources for extending the learning

[Salmonids in the Classroom – Primary](#)

Elementary, Middle

[Fish Friends](#)

Elementary, Middle

[We're the Future of the Great Lakes](#)

Elementary



- Northern [Canada Geese](#) are beginning to fly south, usually in V's or skeins moving south or southeast high in the sky. Local [Giant Canada Geese](#), a subspecies, are flocking and moving around, but will not leave unless and until local freeze up.
- [Eastern Chipmunks](#), [Eastern Gray Squirrels](#), [Red Squirrels](#), and [Groundhogs](#) are still busy eating, and in the case of the first three, storing, food. Only the Groundhog is a true hibernator, and will stuff its face until fall frosts kill the plants it eats. It will then waddle into its burrow and sleep until March (or February, if you believe the weather guys).
- A few [Spring Peepers](#) and [Gray Treefrogs](#) may be calling from wetlands during the day. These are typically first-year males, and they may be responding to similar day/night patterns as in the spring.
- [Woolly Bear](#) caterpillars are on the move, among the last caterpillars (along with [Yellow Bear](#) and [American Dagger Moth](#)) to be out and about. They will over winter under bark, rocks or logs. A narrow middle band is supposed to foretell a mild winter. Find some and make a prediction!
- This part of the month brings the fall [equinox](#), the time when day equals night. This year, it occurs on Friday, the 23rd. The exact time that the sun appears to cross the equator is 5:04 A.M. EDT.

Ozone Day:
September 16th, 2011

Great Canadian
Shoreline Clean Up:
September 17- 25