

Step Outside: Your Guide to Nature's Events

Nature Guides

Bountiful Roadside Blooms

Mid-September 2011

Featured Species: Roadside Flowers

Both asters and goldenrods dominate roadsides and old fields at this time of year. While each group is very easily identified by either their small, sunflower-like, purple, violet or white flowers (asters), or their sprigs of tiny, yellow-gold flowers (goldenrods), there may be several to many species in your area – the Kawarthas have over 15 of each. Goldenrods in particular have gotten a bad, and completely undeserved, reputation as a cause of hay fever, or fall allergies. In fact, the culprit is usually lurking at the base of these showy flowers: Common Ragweed. While goldenrod species have a heavy pollen carried by insects (thus the showy flowers), the inconspicuous ragweed flowers produce millions of light, spiky pollen grains designed to be carried on the wind, only a few of which are enough to cause allergy symptoms. Interestingly, ragweed is also in the aster family.

These flowers anchor a diverse food web which includes Honey Bees, wasps, long-horned beetles, soldier beetles, ambush bugs, Monarch Butterflies, Goldenrod Spiders and hoverflies, which mimic bees or wasps. Another fly attracted to goldenrod, in particular Tall Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis* var. *scabra*), is the Goldenrod Gall Fly (*Eurosta solidaginis*), a highly-adapted fruit fly which lays its eggs in the plant's stem, producing galls within which the larvae develop and overwinter. There is only one larva per gall, but a stem may have more than one gall. Before entering diapause (a form of dormancy) for the winter the larvae will eat a route out (leaving the 'skin' of the gall intact; picture 3) to use in the spring. Even inside this protective dome, the larva has perils and is preyed on by parasitic wasp and beetle larvae. We will add to the larvae's predators come winter time.

Other Happenings:

- White-throated Sparrows are arriving from further north, and will be around for several weeks. Look for them at backyard feeders, or scatter sunflower seeds on the ground close to cover.
- Migrating Broad-winged Hawks are high in the sky on a NW winds. Lake Ontario is a hot spot for viewing as the hawks skirt the lake enroute south. In Toronto, Hawk Hill in High Park offers good viewing right in the city.
- Just after a cold front is a good time to see many migrating birds, as they get an extra push from the north wind.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are leaving – keep an eye on feeders for a final fill-up before departure.
- White-tailed Deer are getting their warmer, gray-brown winter coat, and bucks are rubbing the velvet off their antlers in preparation for the rut.
- Small groups of bats will be on the move in the evenings, migrating south (Red, Hoary and Silver-haired) or to hibernation sites in Ontario (Big Brown and Little Brown). Mating may also take place, though the sperm is stored in the female until spring, when ovulation and fertilization happen.
- Frogs are on the move to their hibernation sites in streams, ponds and rivers, particularly on warm, wet evenings. Avoid low-lying roads at that time!
- Baby turtles are hatching. Look for shallow pits in gravelly areas near water, and you may find the discarded eggshells.
- Beechdrops bloom. Mushrooms pop up in woodlands – be careful, some are poisonous!
- Red Maples growing near water turn bright red, beginning the change in colours – more will follow...

Top R4R Picks
Resources for extending the learning

Little Brown Bat
Elementary

Big Water Ideas 2
Elementary

- There are seasonal colours underwater too! [Brook Trout](#) are feeding closer to shore and sometimes sun themselves. The orange and red pigments on the males are acquired from consuming [crustacean](#) bodies. Brook Trout will spawn later in late October to late November.

Ozone Day: September
16th, 2011

Great Canadian
Shoreline Clean Up:
September 17- 25