



SEPTEMBER PHENOLOGY

A reflective look at 2011

by Jim Gilbert, Naturalist

September is a transition month, the time of summer's ending. Usually the first half of the month is summery, but the last days feel like true autumn. Listed below are a few observations from a year ago in the Twin Cities Metro area, Waconia and areas beyond when indicated. These events can be used to anticipate upcoming happenings and will help you compare 2012 with last year.

September 1 * On this first day of meteorological autumn, we see touches of fall colors on native basswoods, sugar maples and sumacs. Only a few Baltimore Orioles continue coming to feeding stations; a good share of them left in the last couple of days.

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Wood Ducks, Wild Turkeys and white-tailed deer feed on fallen acorns. Black-and-white and Chestnut-sided Warblers are among many species moving through the area. Common Nighthawks also head south.



September 3 * The orange and yellow flowers of native jewelweed attract numerous Ruby-throated Hummingbirds.

September 6 * From Waconia to LeSueur and beyond, soybean and cornfields look healthy. Farmers harvest their fourth crop of alfalfa. Common tree frogs perch on zinnias and other large flowers during the day and on screens at night in their hunt for insects.

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A Red-breasted Nuthatch migrates into the area, the first to be spotted this season. Common grackles gather in flocks. American Robins, Cedar Waxwings and Gray Catbirds feast on ripe wild grapes. It's another 90°F day.



September 11 * Lake surface temperatures are still in the mid-70s. The first common milkweed pods open and soybeans turn golden-yellow. American Crows once again seek the relative safety and warmth of communal roosts.

September 14 * Cicadas buzz and jewelweeds bloom. Common milkweeds burst with showy flower clusters.

September 15 * The first frost kills tomato and pumpkin plants. Migration over Hawk Ridge in Duluth accelerates, with about 13,000 broad-winged hawks counted today. The major flights usually occur September 8-23. Fourteen species of hawks and other raptors are regular migrants over Hawk Ridge.

September 17 * Today marks the first sighting of a White-throated Sparrow in Afton.

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The first sighting of a Dark-eyed Junco this autumn occurs near Bagley in Clearwater County. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate by day; most leave northern Minnesota by September 12 and southern Minnesota by September 25.



September 21 * Flocks of Northern Flickers and Eastern Bluebirds move through the area.

September 25 * Observers of a feeding station in Victoria, Minnesota report first visits by White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos. Oberg Mountain near Tofte is at its autumn color peak.

September 28 * Sumac shrubs display splashy red foliage along roadsides. Beautiful fall colors extend along Highway 1 from Ely to Finland.

September 30 * New England asters continue to bloom, attracting migrating monarch butterflies.