

SEPTEMBER 15-30, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EAST VIEW

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

This is a hawk that doesn't seem to have a neck; when perched, the head most of the time, seems to be scrunched down on top of its shoulders. This and its size are keys to its identification.



Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter straitus*

Photo © Coffee Creek Watershed Preserve

I have seen these hawks fly through our campus, but they do not seem to stop long enough for me to grab my camera to take a shot.

Accipiters have short wings, and a long tail. This characteristic is primarily for being able to swiftly maneuver through woodland tree branches while they chase birds. Whereas, the Buetos, e.g. Red-tail and Rough-legged Hawks, are larger, with larger rounded wings and shorter wider tails for soaring over field and meadow looking for prey. When seen they will dive for a rabbit, mouse or some unsuspecting mammal on the ground. The Cooper's Hawk that I wrote about in my August Notes and the Sharp-shinned Hawk are the types of hawk that are primarily a go- after-birds type raptor. Although they both look similar and have similar plumage colors, the Cooper's is somewhat larger than the Sharp-shinned Hawk. The key to identifying a Sharp-shinned Hawk, when the "Sharpie" is alone, is the appearance of no neck. The Cooper's does have a neck and is larger, cocky, arrogant and has a very persistent and fearless attitude. It will perch near a human dwelling for a period of time as long as it doesn't feel threatened. The Sharp-shinned Hawk's behavior is not like the Cooper's. It does not show off any of the behavioral characteristics of a Cooper's; it is not about to stay around a human dwelling or in the presence of people for long. Yes, you might see a Sharpie perched in a tree in the woods across from the tall cattails and canary grass, but he/she will not perch on a rock beside the Inn like the Cooper's did last month.

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It will certainly fly through our property and in the process "pick off" a Mourning Dove, a sparrow or starling, but after the kill it will fly with it to the woods to eat it.

A Cooper's would just as soon dine where it killed the bird, similar to a falcon, nicely plucking it before tearing off the neck and breast meat. If a Cooper's is interrupted it will most likely mantle the kill, covering it with its wings, and look at you defiantly. If it can't fly off with its prey, it has been known to run off or fly to a nearby branch and wait for you to leave. "Fearless" is probably the best adjective I can give for a Cooper's Hawk, and "cautious" for the Sharp-shinned.

FALL FOLIAGE

When is the best time to see the color of fall foliage here in Vermont? The last two weeks in September to the first two weeks in October is the best time. There is a difference between when the color is rich in the mountains compared to the Champlain Valley. Color will start at higher elevations and work its way down the mountains as September progresses into October. Also, as you move south color will be later in MA compared to the mountains of NH and VT.



Red Maple, *Acer rubrum* Photo © Dick Harlow

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The reds turning to yellow then brown during the summer into fall, usually suggests that the leaves are undergoing those color changes because they are stressed due to disease, lack of or too much water for that particular species of tree.

During a good fall, when the trees have average rainfall during the summer, no drought, fairly normal summer temperatures without the consequence of drying winds, you can expect good color amongst certain species of trees.

Red Maple – As its name implies, this native tree, in a good year, will produce all shades of reds to almost purple.

Sugar Maple – fall foliage runs the gamut from yellow to orange to red. In a good year this tree is spectacular and rates number one in the northeast for the colors it can produce.

Aspen/Poplar – produces spectacular deep yellows and shades of gold colors in the fall. Probably more rich and vibrant in the west.

These are the big three for color variation. Many of the other trees and shrubs fill in the fall symphony of color much like a symphony orchestra.

The beginning of trees changing their colors begins as day length shortens along with changing air temperature. This in turn causes the **green pigment, chlorophyll**, the primary producer of sugar in the tree, to stop its production thus beginning the pigment's break down and ultimate disintegration. During the life of the leaf, there are other pigments in the leaf besides chlorophyll, that now begin to show themselves. Because chlorophyll masks the other colors, they will now be able to stand out and sparkle.

The pigments, **xanthophylls** produce yellows, **carotenoids** produce orange, and **anthocyanins** produce red and purple.

SEPTEMBER SUNSET AT EASTVIEW



Looking West from Deer Meadow Drive
Photo © Dick Harlow

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Looking West from Deer Meadow Drive
Photo © Dick Harlow

SUPERMOON, BLOOD MOON

I am sure most of you watched the developing lunar eclipse on Sunday evening September 27th. However, since 1982 when the last event such as this occurred, the 27th will probably be my last 'Supermoon' where the full moon and the total eclipse of the moon are happening together.

This phenomenon won't happen again until 2033. This event happens when the Moon is closest to the Earth, therefore appearing larger in our sky. During a total Lunar Eclipse, the moon will turn reddish, thus the name "Blood Moon".

To refresh peoples' memories – a total lunar eclipse results when Sun, Moon, and Earth are aligned with each other, with the Moon on the opposite side of the earth from the Sun. As the full Moon moves into Earth's shadow, you can see that effect on the Moon's surface with the increasing curve of the Earth's sphere appearing over the surface of the Moon. As the Moon moves into the Earth's shadow its reflected light from the sun gets darker and darker, although still visible; but the visible light is filtered out leaving some red. Thus, the effect shows a blood red moon, even though it may be seen as either the color red, rust or gray due to weather and conditions here on Earth.

The following are shots taken that night to give some semblance of what the Eclipse looked like. **They are not fancy or large.**

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Photo © Dick Harlow

This is the way the Moon looked when it first appeared above the tree line in the early evening.



Photo © Dick Harlow

Here the Earth's shadow is covering about one half of the Moon's surface.

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Photo © Dick Harlow

And, here you can see the reds being visible as the Earth's shadow is almost covering the Moon's surface. At least enough of the visible spectrum is filtered out so that you can begin to see just red.

OBSERVATIONS FOR SEPTEMBER

MAMMALS

- Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
- Gray Squirrel
- Muskrat
- Coyotes evening barking

AMPHIBIANS

- American Toad
- Green Frog

BUTTERFLIES

- Cabbage White
- Clouded Sulphur
- Orange Sulphur
- Viceroy
- Monarch

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DRAGONFLIES

- Ruby Meadowhawk
- White-faced Meadowhawk
- Yellow-legged Meadowhawk

Weather Tidbits **SEPTEMBER 2015**

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EDT).

PRECIPITATION

Until the last day of the month precipitation was: 32.8 mm or 1.3 inches.

On Sept 30: 71.6 mm or 2.8 inches. The total for the month is a respectable 104.4 mm or 4.1 inches of rainfall.

However, it is tough for plants to grow with only 1.3 inches during 29 days of the month.

Overcast Days: 7

WIND

Highest wind: 29 MPH, 19th Sept. Direction: South

**Average Wind speed: Sept 2015:
1.8 mph,**

Dominate Wind Direction: North

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 11

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH or greater: 0

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: 22.2 C⁰ 72 °F

High Temp: 34.1 C⁰ 93 °F

Low Temp: 5.7 C⁰ 42 °F