

NOVEMBER 15 – 30, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

SUNSETS



Sunset looking west as the clouds and rain begin to build from Hurricane Nate. October 2017. © Dick Harlow

For some reason sunsets seem to be a favorite sighting in the sky. Is it the beauty of the red bouncing off the clouds? Is it the deep red hovering over the distant profile of mountain tops or forest trees? Or, is it simply the sign of the end of the day, a time to retire until we start over again tomorrow?



Another red sky sunset looking west taken end of September. © Dick Harlow

Sunsets have to do with how light as seen and processed by our eyes and nervous system.

When the sun is high in the sky at 12 noon, visible light reaches our eyes with equal intensity. As the sun climbs to 12 noon and lowers toward dusk the angle of the sunlight (wavelengths) now has to pass through different layers of the atmosphere before that light reaches our eyes. As the sun lowers to the horizon the atmospheric affects, or air molecules, are responsible for scattering the shorter wavelengths of light such as violet and blue. Therefore, only the longer wavelengths of yellow, reds and oranges are able to penetrate.

The ease with which light penetrates the different layers of the atmosphere is dependent on the particles that are in the path of sunlight. The number and type of particles determine the kind of sunset you will observe. When there are few particles in the atmosphere most light, wavelengths of light, will reach the observer with the same intensity. This will appear as a white or yellow sunset. Increase the particles, e.g. dust, smoke, clouds of various thicknesses, etc., now the reds and oranges are able to appear.

Therefore, besides being awesome, sunsets represent an indication of the various associated particles within the atmosphere. For example, how many times have you seen a red sunset and hear on the news about fires raging in parts of the US, or storms which bring in particles from the land or ocean causing a beautiful appearing sunset.

When reds and oranges are strongly visible in a sunset, we now know that there are a lot of particles in the atmosphere. And, when the sunset has minimal color, such as yellows and white light there are fewer particles in the atmosphere. Consequently, less color equals less picturesque opportunity.

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WILD TURKEY

“While no records exist of the exact bill of fare, the Pilgrim chronicler Edward Winslow noted in his journal that the colony’s governor, [William Bradford](#), sent four men on a “fowling” mission in preparation for the three-day event. Wild—but not domestic—turkey was indeed plentiful in the region and a common food source for both English settlers and Native Americans. But it is just as likely that the fowling party returned with other birds we know the colonists regularly consumed, such as ducks, geese and swans. Instead of bread-based stuffing, herbs, onions or nuts might have been added to the birds for extra flavor.”

© History.com

We can’t go through November, the month of Thanksgiving without talking about the Wild Turkey.



Wild Turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo*, Male

© [Lee Anne Russell](#)

The turkey you had for Thanksgiving is probably a white feathered domestic relative of the Wild Turkey the pilgrims feasted upon. Unless, of course, you went out and shot a Wild Turkey, similar to the picture above. What seems common to us today here in Vermont was not common before the 1970’s. The Wild Turkey was almost extirpated from Vermont, but was reintroduced in 1969 and

now it is common in most of its former range. The fact that a native bird had to be reintroduced says a lot about what we have done to the environment.

The habitat for the Wild Turkey are mountain forests, woodland edges extending to fields and meadows, swamps, generally most any spot in the Champlain valley or for that matter anywhere in Vermont. Wherever turkeys find food, they will “put up shop” find a nesting place and bring up their young.

The reason Benjamin Franklin preferred the Wild Turkey to the Bald Eagle is that a Wild Turkey is known for its wariness and the males’ magnificent display, truly a beautiful bird. Today, unfortunately, the domestic turkey is raised to be eaten and the wild magnificence is bred out of them.

The Wild Turkey is omnivorous. It has a diet that varies from leaves or grass to spiders and frogs. They will eat acorns, seeds, grains, berries, buds, roots. Also they will not pass up insects, snails, a lizard and even a snake.

As far as I am aware, we have had just one Wild Turkey, walk from the wood’s edge in back of the cottages to the back yard of Woodruff and Venman cottages. It was a single hen that I observed. We have not, unfortunately, seen that Wild Turkey since 2016.

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OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Red Fox – paw prints in garden
Coyotes – howling at night
Meadow Vole – viewed making tunnels

Weather Tidbits

Month of SEPTEMBER 1-30, 2017

*[All Measurements taken at solar noon
\(1230 EST\).](#)*

PRECIPITATION

**Total Precipitation: 42.6 mm or 1.7
inches**

Overcast Days: 14