



Ferrum Nature Society

Dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of our natural world

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Events:

Saturday, Sept 10th: Hawk Watch

In conjunction with the New River Valley Bird Club we will be counting migrating hawks up on Rocky Knob on the Parkway. Meet at the overlook just south of the Rocky Knob Ranger Station around 10AM. If you come late, follow the trail into the cattle pasture just north of the overlook parking lot. Bring a lunch, binoculars, and a lawn chair.

Nature's Events

- Signs of fall to look for are some of the early leaf changes exhibited by dogwoods and blackgum.
- Songbirds and raptors start heading south this month. We probably will not see our winter visitors from Canada until October.
- Early September is the peak of the hurricane season, yet we have already had 11 named storms, the earliest forming on June 8th.

Sky Calendar:

Sept 17: Full moon – known as the Harvest Moon.

Sept 22: Autumnal Equinox will occur at 4:23pm EDT. This marks the beginning of fall in the northern hemisphere.

Katydid – Todd Fredericksen

Late in July on a still, humid summer's night, you will begin to hear the chirp of katydid. The pleasant, repetitive call of these night creatures is one of many reasons to open the windows, turn over the air conditioning and let the bugs sing you to sleep. Katydid will continue to chirp almost to until the first frost and they produce the most audible of all night sounds.

Katydid are part of Tettigoniidae, the long-horned grasshopper family. Like crickets, they produce sound by scarping their file-like bottom of one their front wing against the sharp edge of their other front wing in a process called "stridulation". The sound produced resembles "katy-did-it" or "katy-did", hence the name.

Katydid stridulation is all about sex. Males do most of the calling, although females will also chirp in response. After mating, females will carved a slit in a branch or bark with a sickle-shaped ovipositor and deposit eggs. Adult katydids die before winter, but their eggs overwinter and

hatch into nymphs(miniature adults) which then undergo successive molts on their way to becoming mature katydids.



As with crickets, the speed of katydid stridulation is closely controlled by temperature. As nighttime temperatures start to decrease in August and September, katydid chirping slows down. Air temperature can be estimated by the equation $T = (C+161)/3$, with T indicating Temperature and C indicating the number of calls per minute.

Adult katydids are bright green and most are herbivorous, feeding on foliage and flower petals of deciduous trees. There are several species in our area including the true katydid (*Pterophylla camellifolia*) and different species of bush, meadow, and nine tree katydids

Flower of the Month: Flower-of-the-Hour (*Hibiscus trionum*)



Flower-of-the-hour (*Hibiscus trionum*) is a common roadside, flower of the Mallow family that can be seen blooming now (July – Sept.). This plant is a native of Europe and was introduced as a garden flower and has naturalized in our area. The plant grows to a height of 12-24 inches and is characterized by deeply grooved, trifoliate leaves that are coarsely toothed. The flowers have 5 creamy yellow petals with a deep crimson/purple throat. The flowers open only in the mornings, usually around 10 am and will bloom for only an hour or two. The flower then quickly wilts and forms a calyx that is bladder like – resembling a Chinese lantern.

The Raccoon - Kyle Carter



Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) are mainly recognized by their masked facial feature, ringed tail, and habit of damaging yards, gardens and even buildings. Adult raccoons range in size from about 2-3 feet in length and weigh between 12-35 pounds. Their tail has 4 to 7 rings and the mask is said to be a distinctive identifying mark since it is different on every raccoon. The mask also helps them see better at night, and reduces glare during the day. Their front paws are hand-like their hind paws are long and flat.

Raccoons are mostly nocturnal. They are more active in spring and on cloudy or foggy days. A male raccoon's home range covers 3 to 20 miles and the female's anywhere from 1 to 6 miles. Raccoons den in hollow trees, brush, drain pipes, and barns. They are excellent climbers and enter trees head first. They are omnivores, eating a wide range of foods from berries, eggs, and vegetables to fish, mice, crayfish and whatever they can find in our trashcans. They also like to dip or "wash" their food in water. They do not have many predators, but some that do have an impact are foxes, coyotes, hunters, and cars.

Raccoons usually have 3-5 young born in April to May and have only one litter per year. Mating occurs in February and March with the gestation period lasting 63 days. Young can stay with the female until the spring of the following year.

Raccoons can be a very big nuisance. They sometimes form a community waste area used by several individuals to dispose of their waste. They also tear up trash bags, trash cans, and will occasionally fight domestic animals. Raccoons can be a real problem for poultry, often raiding nests or attacking adult birds, and they can affect wild birds even more. In some areas they have eliminated entire communities of waterfowl. Raccoons can be a very helpful scavenger in nature but in areas inhabited by humans they can be a rather big nuisance.

A Different Type of Fall Color – Dr. Bob Pohlad

As fall approaches many of us turn our eyes to the trees to watch for signs of the changing seasons. Some of us watch the animals as they prepare for winter. We watch sourwoods turn red and purple and then we look for maple trees turning oranges, reds, and purples. Some of us however, anticipate the heavy rains (like those of an impending tropical storm) that direct our attention to the world of fungi. Within twenty-four hours after a heavy rain a whole world of mushrooms, puffballs, coral fungi, boletes, and slime molds poke their 'fruiting bodies' out of the forest floor and decaying trees.



It is like an early (or late) Easter egg hunt to the avid mushroom hunter to look for that 'new' find. What a colorful display. Have you ever wondered why so many different kinds and colors occur? We know that this kingdom of organisms thrives year-round in the soil, litter, and living tissue. Most mushrooms are associated with roots of trees as mycorrhizae and help trees absorb nutrients such as the *Amanita* pictured above often associated with pines. They produce mushrooms or other fruiting structures to aid in the spread of their spores. Others work at decomposition of plant, animal, and other microbes aiding in recycling, such as this *Lycogala* slime mold found here on a downed log. (Still others are parasites on plants and animals, such as *Cordyceps*) growing on a grub from the soil. Fungi are found in many colors, shapes, and habitats. Fall is the best time for foraging or just enjoying the 'hunt'. Some are good to eat but be careful. Many are very poisonous. Only an expert knows for sure. Happy Hunting!!