



The Ferrum Nature Society Bulletin

Dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of our natural world

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Nature's events:

Bird swap Winter migrants arrive from the north this month, while many species that breed in our area have headed further south. Look for Juncos, White-throated Sparrows, and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers showing up in our area this month.



Fall color? The hot and dry summer has caused some tree leaves to turn brown and fall early. On the other hand, a dry fall with marked differences in day and nighttime temperatures can lead to more spectacular fall color due to an increase in the production of the red pigment anthocyanin.

Sky calendar:

Full moon - October 26th - is called the "Hunter's moon".

Planets - Jupiter is the prominent planet in the sky this month. Saturn, Mars, and Venus are also visible.

Orionid Meteor Shower - peak is Oct. 21.

Volume 5, Issue 10

October 2007

Just the Bear Facts

Olivia Mendoza

The Black Bear (*Ursus americana*) is only found in North America, where the population is estimated at over 750,000. The ideal habitat for Black Bears is a large forested area with different fruits and nuts. Black Bears often thrive in lowlands and wetlands, where there is plenty of food, drinking water, and cooling areas. Bears have no permanent home; they sleep in a tree or on the ground. They live in a variety of places and also have a variety of colors.

The color of this species can vary from black, brown, blonde, to (rarely) white. In most populations, the white chest patch is uncommon. The eyes of cubs are blue and as the bear grows, the eyes become brown. The average weight of a male black bear ranges from 125-500 lbs., while females weigh between 90-300 lbs. Weight depends on age, season, and food supply. At birth, cubs weigh only 5-15 lbs.

Mating season is from late May to early July. In eastern forests, mating season can extend into August. Mother bears give birth to their cubs in January and early February. Cubs stay with their mother for 17 months and then the mother lets her cubs go out on their own, usually within a week before she mates. Mother bears prefer bedding down under large trees, such as mature White Pine or Hemlock, because it is safe for their small cubs. Females raise the cubs for half the year and take their cubs into hibernation with her.

Black Bears are hibernators with a low body temperature, unlike chipmunks, woodchucks, and ground squirrels. Small mammals awaken every few days, raise their temperature to over 94°F, and then go on with hibernating. Black Bears can hold body temperature very well and can hibernate for long periods of time.

While hibernating, Black Bears maintain their body temperature within 12 degrees of their average temperature. The length of hibernation depends on food availability. The more food Black Bears eat, the longer they hibernate. Where food is available all year, bears

have no need to hibernate. Black Bears do not just hibernate anywhere. They hibernate in a forest where food is easily available to them when they wake up from hibernation. Bears start making dens in mid to late December. They make their den in tree cavities, hollow logs, overhanging rock ledges, and beneath fallen evergreen trees. Black Bears live where they are safe; that does not mean other species are safe from them.



Photo by Nell Fredericksen

Black Bears are omnivores. They eat plants, fruits, nuts, insects, honey, fish, and small mammals and, sometimes, fawns. In the spring, 95% of their diet is plant food. Nuts become very important in the fall diet. Most of their summer diet consists of blackberry, blueberry, huckleberry and black cherry fruits.

Many people are afraid of meeting a Black Bear in the woods, but most injuries from bears in the U.S. are caused by the Grizzly Bear, which occurs in the western U.S. Black Bears are not usually aggressive animals. When they are scared, they make blowing noises and they clack their teeth. If given the opportunity, they will run away rather than confront humans.

That's "Mr. Daddy Longlegs" to you!

Andrew Maxwell

Daddy Longlegs (*Leiobunum* spp.) can be found anywhere from a hiking trail to your own kitchen cupboard. They look very intriguing with a pea-sized body and eight long, scraggly legs. This creature has many different names, but the most common of them all is the "Daddy Longlegs". So what exactly is a Daddy Longlegs, a spider or an insect? What do they do when they are not crawling up your leg? Is it true they are the most poisonous arthropods in the world? We have all seen a Daddy Longlegs at some point or another and I am sure that most of us have referred to them as a spider.

Although our long-legged friend resembles a spider, it is in fact not a spider, nor, is it an insect, surprisingly. The more correct name for a Daddy Longlegs is "harvestmen", which is not in the order Arachnida, but in an order called Phalangida. Daddy Longlegs have the same anatomy as a spider (head, thorax, and abdomen), but have all of the components in one compact body segment. Insects have the same body components, but have three distinct body segments. The Daddy Longlegs has many different characteristics which help in its daily life. On the top of its pea-like body is a black dot, which is a tubercle with two black eyes looking out.



Bugguide.net

When it gets hungry, these omnivorous critters use pedipalps to sense for food and their chelicerae (similar to jaws), to hold the food until it has been consumed. Of course, the most recognizable and impressive feature of the Daddy Longlegs is its long legs. The legs can reach up to thirty times as long as the body size and are detachable in emergencies. If a Daddy Longlegs is caught, it can detach a portion of its leg and scamper off while the detached piece distracts predators by continuing to quiver. Do not fret; our incredible, long-legged friend can grow new legs to replace broken ones. Adults usually hide during the day and become active in the evenings. During the active time, the daddy longlegs searches for food using its pedipalps. Summer is mating season for these fascinating creatures. The ritual of mating for the Daddy Longlegs is the male climbs on the female's back and injects spermatozoa into her gonopore. The female then deposits the eggs into soil or wood crevices, in which the following spring the eggs hatch.

While researching these seemingly innocent creatures, I could not help but wonder if the stories about them being highly poisonous were true. I found that there is no evidence of the daddy longlegs being venomous. There are also no reports of anyone being bitten by a daddy longlegs.

Ravens Janet Waters

Ravens are dark, black birds that belong to the same family as crows and jays. They are highly intelligent and make a croak-like sound that is very deep and tends to vary. Compared to other birds, they are capable of living a very long time and are also extremely intelligent. They get most of their food through scavenging.



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Ravens are also known for their close relationship with the Tower of London in England. No one knows when Ravens first arrived at the Tower of London, but they have been protected there by a royal decree since the reign of Charles II. Therefore, for over 900 years the Tower of London has been a safe place for Ravens in England. It is said that there was a prophecy long ago that the Crown and the tower will fall if the Ravens ever left the Tower of London.

Locally, ravens can be spotted along the Blue Ridge Parkway, especially during fall migration. They can be distinguished from crows by their longer, curved nose and their nasal "cronk".

Partial albino bullfrog — captured on Ferrum College campus, August 2007.

