

a [phoretic pseudoscorpion](#) before I even noticed not one, but several of these cryptically colored jewel beetles on the trunk of the tree.

Like other species in the genus, the brilliant metallic gaudiness of *Dicerca lurida* as a pinned insect specimen in a cabinet belies its near invisibility when sitting on the bark of its host trees. Several different trees have been reported as hosts (Nelson 1975), but hickories of the genus *Carya* seem to be the most preferred. The beetles rapidly colonize wind-thrown or cut trees and branches while the wood is still hard and strong, and I have collected it from a number of hickories and reared it from dead pignut hickory (*Cary glabra*) and shellbark hickory (*Carya laciniosa*), as well as sandbar willow (*Salix exigua*). Most jewel beetles are active as adults only during a limited time during the season – typically late spring and early summer in eastern North America, but species of *Dicerca* occur as adults throughout the year – even during winter hibernating under loose bark.

This individual probably represents one of those hibernating adults that resumed activity in the first warm days of spring, searching for freshly killed host trees on which to mate and lay their eggs.

Widespread across eastern North America, it is perhaps the commonest species of the genus and one of the commonest jewel beetles in North America. Yet, despite its abundance, year-round occurrence, relatively large size, and attractive coloration, its cryptic habits keep it seldom seen by those who don't look for it.

REFERENCE:

Nelson, G. H. 1975. A revision of the genus *Dicerca* in North America (Coleoptera: Buprestidae). *Entomologische Arbeiten aus dem Museum G. Frey* 26:87–180.



Rejoicing the End of Summer

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Last week I awoke to refreshingly cool temperatures for the first time in a long time – a brutal heat wave that had gripped the Midwest for

¹ Reprinted from an article posted August 28, 2010 on the author's website: <http://beetlesinthebush.wordpress.com>.



Russet browns of big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) and Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) blend with still-green foliage in early autumn at White River Balds Natural Area in southwestern Missouri. Photo by Ted C. MacRae.

some time had finally (if only briefly) passed. Missouri typically experiences substantial heat and humidity during the height of summer, a result of warm, moisture-laden air sweeping up from the Gulf of Mexico and over our mid-continental position. The first cool snap in mid-August, however, usually marks the beginning of the end of protracted heat. High temps may return (and usually do), but they are intermittent and the writing is on the wall – summer's end is near, and fall is on its way! For most of my life, the coming of fall has always been something to which I looked forward eagerly – it really is my favorite time of year. I don't just love fall, I adooore it!!!

As a result, I sometimes forget that not everyone shares my feelings, so when I mentioned to a colleague last week how excited I was that fall was on the way, I was a little surprised by her less-than-pleased reaction. Kids I can understand – fall means a return to school and the end of fun and sun and no responsibilities. However, for most adults, fall does not entail as dramatic a paradigm shift – we get up and go to work everyday regardless of the season. Indeed, to my colleague, fall was not dreaded so much for what it is but what it portends – winter! I convinced myself that if she was as interested in natural history as I, surely she would appreciate fall as a time of transition in the natural world. This logic proved faulty, however, when just a few days later one of my favorite entomologist/natural historian bloggers voiced a similar lamentation.

That the charms of fall are not immediately apparent to everyone is beyond me. Who in middle America doesn't rejoice the end of long,



Xeric calcareous prairie ("cedar glade") at White River Balds Natural Area in southwestern Missouri - habitat for *Cicindela obsoleta vulturina*. Photo by Ted C. MacRae

sweltering days as they cede to the cool days of fall? Who dreads the crisp, clean, autumn air and its pungent, earthy aromas? Who doesn't marvel as they watch the landscape morph from summer's monotonous shades of green – its forests becoming a riot of red, orange, and yellow, its grasslands a shifting mosaic of tawny, amber, and gold, and in all places shadows cast long and sharp by a cool yellow sun riding low in a deep blue sky?

For the natural historian, fall offers even more than just these sensory gifts – it's not the end of the season, but rather part of a repeating continuum that includes birth, growth, senescence and quiescence. Plants that have not yet flowered begin to do so in earnest, while those that have shift energy reserves into developing seeds. The spring wildflowers may be long gone, but only now do the delicate blooms of [Great Plains Ladies'-tresses](#) (*Spiranthes magnicamporum*) rise up on their tiny spires. Grasses also, anonymous during the summer, now reach their zenith – some with [seed heads as exquisite](#) as any summer flower. Insects and other animals step up activity, hastily harvesting fall's bounty to provision nests or fatten their stores in preparation for the long, winter months ahead.

For me, it is tiger beetles that are fall's main attraction. Yes, tiger beetles are out during spring and summer as well, but there is something special about the fall tiger beetle fauna. Glittering green, wine red, and vivid white, a number of tiger beetles make a brief appearance in the fall after having spent the summer as larvae, hidden in the ground while feeding on hapless insects that



Gypsum Hills in Barber County, south-central Kansas – habitat for *Cicindela pulchra*. Photo by Rich Thoma.

chanced too close to their burrows, until late summer rains triggered pupation and transformation to adulthood. As the rest of nature prepares for sleep, these gorgeous beetles take their first, tentative steps into the autumn world for a brief session of feeding and play before winter chases them back underground for the winter. Every fall for the past several years now, I have looked forward to the annual fall tiger beetle trip to see some of the different species and the unique landscapes which harbor them. From the “cedar glades” of Missouri’s Ozark Highlands and Gypsum Hills of south-central Kansas, to the Sandhills of central Nebraska and Black Hills of South Dakota, I’ve acquired an even greater passion for a season that I already loved. I’ll never forget the first time I saw *Cicindela pulchra* (beautiful tiger beetle) flashing iridescently across the barren red clay. I still remember the excitement of seeing my first *C. obsoleta vulturina* (prairie tiger beetle) launching itself powerfully from amongst the clumps of big bluestem. I recall my amazement at my first encounter with *C. limbata* (sandy tiger beetle) as it danced across deep sand blows, undaunted by scouring 30 mph winds. No doubt I have many equally vivid memories awaiting me in the future, as I intend to keep the annual fall tiger beetle trip a long-standing tradition. For this year, I’m hoping that *C. pulchra* and a few other species will reward a late-September drive to the Nebraska and South Dakota Badlands. Whether they do is almost irrelevant – I love fall, and the chance to see new localities during my favorite time of year will be reward enough.