



# Nature Notes

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### President's Corner

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*Ted C. MacRae, Newsletter Editor*

***“I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers.”—Lucy Maud Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables (1908)***

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Ask astronomers when autumn begins, and they will likely mention the autumnal equinox—that moment when shortening days and lengthening nights become equal as the sun crosses over the celestial equator. According to them, fall begins this year on September 22 (at 9:21 a.m. CDT, to be precise). I agree that autumn begins at a precise moment, but it is not the equinox. Rather, it is an unpredictable moment when a sudden crispness in the air is felt, when the sky suddenly seems bluer and the shadows sharper, when subtle splashes of amber and gold are noticed across landscape. In Missouri's middle latitudes, this usually happens around Labor Day or shortly thereafter. It is a moment that goes unnoticed by those whose lives and livelihoods have lost all connection with the natural world. To plants and animals, however, it is a clear signal to begin making preparations for the long cold months of winter that lie ahead. Plants that have not yet flowered begin to do so in earnest, while those that have already flowered shift resources into developing seeds. Animals take advantage of their final opportunities to feed before enduring the scarcities of winter, digging in to sleep through them, or abandoning the

temperate latitudes altogether and migrating to warmer climes. For many insects, winter will be their end—their futures are in the hands of their offspring, tucked safely away in hastily provisioned nests or lying dormant as eggs; tiny capsules of life whose sole purpose is to survive the harsh winter, hatch in spring, and begin the cycle anew.

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At WGNSS, we have a full slate of activities designed to take full advantage of the splendors of fall. Most notable among these is our newest Natural History Group, the **Nature Photography Group** with field trips to Cuivre River State Park to hunt and photograph slug moth caterpillars on September 24 and Emmenegger Park to photograph the autumn landscape on October 29. Insects – ants, specifically – will be the subject of a talk by **James Trager** at the WGNSS General Meeting on October 5, and the **Entomology Group** will have its own program on October 17. For those who wish to follow the metamorphosis of fall on a more frequent basis, the **Botany Group** continues with their weekly Monday botany excursions, while the **Ornithology Group** offers outings every Thursday and Saturday. Of course, all this time in the field can be tiring, so why not curl up with the **Nature Book Club's** featured selection and join their monthly meeting to discuss it with others. WGNSS is also partnering with Kirkwood Parks and Recreation in a series of autumn nature walks—be sure to join **Bill Duncan, Scott George**, and members of the **Botany Group** as they lead walks on autumn wildflowers, rocks and fossils, and photographing autumn colors. For further information on the above activities, look inside this issue of *Nature Notes*.



## Summer (June/July) Bird Report

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### *David Becher*

The summer was hot and humid with quite a bit of rain in the earlier parts. For the most part, the breeding birds appeared to be in the usual places and numbers. The most unusual report was the soaring Anhinga at Busch Conservation Area. The apparent success of the Least Tern Barges at Riverlands was encouraging. Overall it was a rather quiet summer season.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, Dan Curran and other members of the Thursday Group observed what appeared to be a soaring Anhinga over Busch. Dan and some of the others are familiar with the species, which has a very distinctive appearance in flight. Unfortunately, the bird could not be relocated. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, Keith McMullen found a Neotropic

Cormorant at Horseshoe Lake State Park south of Granite City, Illinois. It remained in the area for some time, perching among the Double-crested Cormorants.

Other than Great Blue Heron and Great Egret, heron numbers appear to have declined seriously in the St. Louis area. Cattle Egret, once very common, is now rarely reported, and numbers of the once common Black-crowned Night-Heron are also apparently down. Richard Parker reported a pair of Black-crowns with a possible nest in Suson Park near the Meramec River on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. The next day Bill Rowe reported a pair at Riverlands along with two Snowy Egrets. On July 14<sup>th</sup>, the Thursday Group found the water pumped down south of the levy at Horseshoe Lake. There were numerous herons, including fair numbers of both Snowy Egrets and Little Blue Herons. A few Black-crowned Night Herons were visible perched in the trees.

A Black Vulture was reported from Bee Tree Park in southern St. Louis County at the beginning of July. This species still seems to be expanding north. Again this year large numbers of Mississippi Kites could be found around Little Creve Coeur. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Thursday Group had a flock of at least 25 on June 16<sup>th</sup>.

On the June 21<sup>st</sup>, Chris Stapleton reported the four Whooping Cranes were again at Kaskaskia Island. They were seen thereafter by numerous people.

As usual a scattering of shorebirds were reported in June and July. It is hard to tell if they are migrating north or south or just wandering. Frank Holmes reported three Willets on Schoolhouse Road near Pontoon Beach, Illinois on July 4<sup>th</sup>. On July 6<sup>th</sup>, Doug Hommert photographed a Dowitcher (sp.) at Clarence Cannon National Wildlife Refuge among a group of Yellowlegs. There was little shorebird habitat down the south levies this year, but on July 20<sup>th</sup> Dave Haenni found a few birds including a Black-necked Stilt, two Short-billed Dowitchers, and a flock of Baird's Sandpipers. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Bill Rowe found a large number of shorebirds at Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge, most of them far away, but he did find about nine species, including Stilt Sandpiper.

Least Terns were found around the nest barges in Teal Pond at Riverlands all summer with counts of twelve or more reported. On June 22<sup>st</sup>, Rick Smith