



## **FOND FAREWELLS FOR FALL - Part 2**

*“For man, autumn is a time of harvest, of gathering together. For nature, it is a time of sowing, of scattering abroad.” Edwin Way Teale*

Our fall walk has taken Norm, my dog, and I deep into the bush where we count our losses as fall erases the last vestiges of spring and summer. It is a sad time knowing that what was can never be again but next spring another world will appear, similar but not identical.

Unlike the black bear, the red squirrel that is stamping its feet and chattering at Norm is going to face winter head on. Since August this little rodent has been preparing his larder by nipping the cones of conifers and storing them in piles, not burying them in individual hiding spots like his

larger cousin, the grey squirrel. He also harvested a crop of mushrooms, placing them in the



crotches of branches to dry before moving them to a pantry in a hollow tree trunk or hole in the ground, or at the base of a tree.

The first migrants passed through our area in July as shorebirds, sandpipers and the like, moved from their Arctic breeding grounds. This was before some birds, such as the American goldfinch, even began nesting. But the summer was good with sufficient rains and sunlight to

guarantee a good food supply for the bugs that became food for nestlings. A few straggling ducks, like the geese that just flew over, have been pushed out of the north by advancing snow. They are the last to leave.

Fall brings an abundance of the fruiting bodies of fungi, more commonly known as mushrooms. In damp fall weather they literally force their way out of the confines of the forest floor, their caps pushing soil, dead leaves and needles. These are the flowers of the fungi, and some are more vivid and showy than others. They are spore producers, grown by organisms that send kilometers of fungal threads through detritus, once living material, recycling the energy that still remains. But a severe frost kills them, and they turn black and disintegrate, adding to the detritus. But their spores

have been freed and floated on the breezes to produce new organisms elsewhere under the right conditions. But these conditions may not come for many months.

The great extinction has come once again. Billions of insect life forms have been extinguished because of the cold. Just a few will survive as adults to renew the species in the spring. Others will rely on the protection of pupas to carry them through the cold. Most depend on their eggs buried in the ground, frozen in pond



and lake water, or secreted behind pieces of bark to carry the species forward.

Billions of plant life forms have bid farewell, their progeny lying in wait in multitudes of seed forms. The replacements for leaves that fell from deciduous trees are already in place in the form of leaf buds. Energy from the summer just past will ensure a jump-start for the new leaves in the spring.

A white feather drifts to earth from the grey, leaden sky. It is followed by another and another. Soon the air is filled with flakes that gently fall, melting on contact with the ground, but by doing so, draining the heat from the forest. Soon the flakes won't melt. I call Norm to me. He shakes a few stubborn snowflakes from his coat and we turn to leave. The season of fall has passed, of that there is no doubt. Would that fall lasted from September 21 to December 21 as the calendar tell us!

We will return again as will spring, but it is with a heavy heart that I consign the life of the past spring and summer to the ravages of cold and decay. The sky is dark, dark with the failing sun and with the gray wool that spews forth the flakes of snow. We place the joys of seasons past on the shelves in the closet of our memories, and reluctantly shut the door. The Great Extinction is almost complete and a new season is awakening.