

BOREAL BITS

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REASONS TO LOVE SUMMER

'When summer days roll on in ecstatic love of life, I am humbled by its greatness and unassuming beauty.' E.B. Philips

Given the vagaries of our weather, summer is the season to love. As I perused past nature journals, I noticed more than a few entries that cause me to step back and marvel at just how wonderful the season is.

Summer usually means warm and possibly hot, no jackets-coats-earmuffs-boots-mitts-or scarves weather. Despite the baring of flesh and consequent attacks by mosquitoes and black flies, we love the opportunity to go about burdened by little clothing and, in the event of biters on the air, a liberal dose of insect repellent. Of course, the warmth follows the increase in daylight. At the end of the second week in July, the night sky at 10 pm provides enough light to read a newspaper by. Even then, the sky stays light in the direction of the land of the midnight sun. Early dawns and late evenings are the stuff of summer.

Summer skies are different from those of other seasons. Huge cumulus, popcorn clouds often dot the summer sky that can be the deepest blue at this time of year. The dust and degree of moisture determines the quality of blue we view but this scientific explanation takes away some of the magic that is a summer day.

In an article written by a journalist transplanted from Southern California to New York State, she begins by stating that she is thrilled to be living in an area that has real seasons. Well, we in this corner of Ontario have real seasons and during the early summer weather we can be guaranteed a lush drape of green that shades us, shelters us, comforts us and thrills us. One of my favourite deciduous trees is the quaking or trembling aspen that provides a background 'hush' as the leaves rattle in the summer breezes. It is because of these trees that when I was a very small child beginning to try to figure out the world, I was convinced that trees created wind.



(P. Burke)

Then there is the early summer riot of wildflower cover. As I write this article the ox-eye daisies are in bloom bobbing their white heads in the fields and roadsides. After months of dry, grey-brown lawns, I find I welcome the brilliant sunshine of dandelion blossoms, but after they succumb to time, other

wild flowers march through late spring, summer and fall. It ends with the last stragglers, the gentle blossoms of pearly everlasting that are white in bloom but turn light grey when they go to seed. It seems as if this wildflower is the one that welcomes winter... even the mention of that word makes me shudder.

One of the joys of summer is the rain shower when water falls in warm torrents and runs down the streets and hillsides. A few summers ago I watched out a picture window as a young girl, fully clothed in summer garb, spread her arms and danced for five minutes in the midst of a warm downpour. The price of this activity was simply wet clothing, the rewards memorable for her and for me.



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So far we haven't mentioned the wildlife. The arrival of the migrants is compelling, the temporary burst of bird song signals the new generation, the deer trade in their old grey winter coats for the reddish-brown coats of summer, the ravens depart (possibly likely to get away from the noisy crows,) the amphibians sing to the night, the young of eagle and osprey grow rapidly in their nests saluting with their wings the air that is their future, young birds join their parents for summer learning activities, spotted fawns follow their moms, bear cubs—ranking at the top of the scale of most cute little ones— romp after

their large and serious moms, dad deer's antlers grow at an alarming pace, skunks decorate our lawns with holes in search of grubs, humming birds thrum to sugar-water feeders, gardeners capture nature in their gardens, chipmunks flit across the roads with their tails held high, and strange birds put in an occasional appearance causing us to scramble for the birding guides before we forget what they looked like.

A pair of pileated woodpeckers spends hours working on a half-metre stump in the backyard making us glad we didn't cut it off at ground level. They are after carpenter ants that chose the stump as a residence—carpenter ants don't eat the wood, they use it to excavate tunnels and chambers. They too are part of summer as are the yellow-shafted flicker and the American toad that delight in ant cuisine.