

# BOREAL BITS

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## OSPREY ROCK

*“Is Fall the beginning, or is it the end? Most likely neither.” A.C. Woltz*

It was a beautiful September day, warm like a summer day which officially it was. Although this year fall begins on September 23, anyone living in our area knows that the seasons can begin any time or, as in the case of this year’s summer, not at all. However, it was rather an average year on this particular September 8 when we ventured to a place affectionately known as Osprey Rock, a lookout that provides a good view of—not surprisingly—an osprey nest. The bush was green, a fact that told us the previous few months must have provided us with sufficient precipitation to avoid brownouts and early colour changes. Some trees and shrubs, birch for one, have root systems that are very shallow and on certain dry years we have noticed the leaves of this species yellowing and falling before August is finished.

The entrance to the trail leading to Osprey Rock is a natural portal. Wild flowers bloom in this area as if Mother Nature herself had planted a garden. However, at this time of year her garden had seen better days as had ours at home. The purple asters were

blooming nicely but the multi-rayed fleabane—named because this flower was dried and stuffed into pillows and mattresses to discourage fleas—were looking a little worn. There were some hawkweeds blooming and, of course, the fall perennial favourite, pearly everlasting. As we walked into the lookout we were greeted by a strong whistling call of osprey, somewhere between a chirp and a whistle. The sound came from an area a distance from the nest but in that the young have fledged, this was not surprising.



All was quiet. Earlier in the spring the forest was alive with bird song. Now there was nothing. A jay called but this was not a song; songs are used to advertise for a mate or declare territorial rights. Calls are used to communicate other messages such as alarm, intruder alert, or where are you? There were a few other birdcalls, more melodic than the jay but we couldn't identify them. Then came our favourite bird song, that of the white throated sparrow. Why this is one of the few birds that will sing long after the family has fledged we do not know. But its song was welcome.

A red squirrel chirred its displeasure at us from the fat branch of white pine, all the while holding a fresh pinecone in its mouth. A few years ago during a nature hike, a woman was so enamored with white pine cones that she collected a handful of them along the way. The only trouble was that she unwittingly collected a coat of sap on each hand along

with everything else that could stick to the sap, twigs, pine needles, fallen leaves, etc. One of nature's big mysteries is why the red squirrel isn't covered with sap from ear to tail tip considering that it is handling the same resinous pinecones on a full time basis.



A quick tour of the Lookout revealed nothing blooming as there had been in previous months. The juniper berries were not blue, joining the desiccated blueberries of past years. Grouse like these berries. The mountain maple keys, one almost brilliant red, were slowly losing their colour, as were the leaves of the shrub itself. Three dragonflies worked the junipers and other shrubbery. Two of these insects of the same species fold their wings forward when they alight. Though both insects share the grey and black markings on their abdomens, one is almost twice the size of the other. Perhaps this is an example of sexual dimorphism, which is defined as differences in size-shape-colouration within the same species attributable to sex. Bald eagles exhibit sexual dimorphism in their size; the female is always the larger of the two. Another species of dragonfly, this one smaller and brown, flitted among the junipers. Dragonflies will mate, and die before winter but their species will live on as eggs or nymphs in an underwater environment. As mentioned, the world was very green. A damp summer and wet fall means that the summer green will fade away rather than suddenly be exchanged for the brilliant fall colours that linger so briefly in this part of the country. The bracken fern had run their course and lay twisted and brown among the weeds and grasses of open spaces. There

was some leaf colour on a few trees or shrubs that have been traumatized over the past months, but nothing widespread.



Autumn is the season of the black bear as they devote full time to eating in order to store sufficient fat for the big sleep. More than ever it is a good time to ensure that garbage cans and dumpsters are secure from the black marauders.

An osprey landed on a perch near the nest and pulled our attention back to the present. We stretched out, slouching on our camp chair and tallied the blessings of the season, the least of which is the absence of biting insects.

*(Photos – P. Burke)*