

Seasonal Sightings (autumn)

Nature Prepares for Winter

Fall is a wonderful time of change, with the northern hemisphere transitioning from summer to winter. As temperatures get colder and the air gets crisper, head out to your local conservation areas to witness nature preparing itself for winter weather.

Prairie grasses turn beautiful colors as they bloom throughout the fall. Despite its name, little bluestem turns a golden amber as big bluestem turns almost purple. Indian grass glows golden with feathery yellow seeds dangling from the stalk. After a summer of bright colors, the muted colors of the fall prairie are peacefully pretty.

With seeds, nuts, and fruits at full bounty, animals scurry about eating as much as they can and storing more for later. Eastern chipmunks, ground squirrels, white-footed deer mice, and grey squirrels are especially active during this time. Birds also seem to awaken from a summer lethargy. Migrators such as wood ducks, Canada geese, sandhill cranes, bluebirds, and scarlet tanagers also eat to their hearts' content, packing on precious layers of fat and energy for their journeys southward.

In late September, the woolly bears are on the move. These black and orange fuzzy caterpillars have been eating leaves all summer, and now they are looking for a good place under bark or leaves to hide out for the winter. They will remain dormant until spring when they then prepare to build cocoons and change into Isabella moths.

Deciduous trees rid themselves of chlorophyll as they prepare to go dormant for the season. Reds, oranges, yellows, and purples are all suddenly revealed as the green fades away. Peak fall color in the woods of Walworth County tends to come in mid-October, but there are different leaf colors from September through November. Sumacs and Virginia creeper turn brilliant red early, while white oak leaves may retain a yellow hue on into late fall.

With all these changes, every visit you make this fall to a conservation area is guaranteed to offer a variety of different experiences and new discoveries. Please take some time with your friends and family to enjoy the unique plants and animals that call our conservation areas home as you hike, bike, ride horses, camp and canoe this fall!