

Field Notes – Second Week of October
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TURN, TURN, TURN

October 8. I went out a walk on the Airline Trail today. The wind was brisk. The light was piercing. The red maple leaves burned like flames against a sapphire sky.



Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) on the Airline Trail, October 8

October 9. No wind. The sugar maples along the Hop River were glowing golden.



Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), Hop River, October 9

October 10. Along the west side of Lake Road, the black oaks are so dark green, they almost look black.



Black Oak (*Quercus velutina*), Lake Road, October 10

On the eastern shore of the Lake, some young red oaks have gone full red.



Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*), Lake Road, October 10

I am overwhelmed by the clarity of the fall color this year—I can hardly contain the thrill I feel as the colors hit my retinas. The trees have been almost uniformly—and undistinguishably—green since the beginning of June. Now each one speaks its identity in the timing and shade of its color. I’m able to see trees as separate individuals, and make up a few mnemonics to help me recognize them in the larger foliar tapestries on the hills, in the woods, around the Lake, and in the red maple swamps.

The red maples are the reddest trees in any landscape right now. They're most abundant near water.



Vivid Red Maples along Gay City Pond, October 11

The sugar maples can be anything from yellow-green to vibrant yellow to orange to pink – but seldom take on the intense red of red maples. *Sometimes* they do—and the red maples can also be yellow! —so it's always nice to look closely if that's possible. The up-close distinction to look for is the shape of the sinuses (indentations) between the points of the leaf. If they're V-shaped, it's a red maple. If they're U-shaped, it's most likely a sugar maple.



Red maple leaves (*Acer rubrum*) – check out the V-shaped sinuses.



Sugar maple leaves (*Acer saccharum*) with their U-shaped sinuses

The first gold of the fall was due to the birches – especially the black birches, which are now largely bare. The “new gold” of this week is due to the shagbark hickories. Their gold is different from that of the maples and the birches; the leaves are thicker—more reflective than translucent. The most colorful hickories I see are right next to the road, and it’s impossible to stop safely to photograph them. But if you see the sunlight bouncing off of large golden leaves, rather than shining through them, it’s likely you’re seeing hickory leaves.



Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*), October 11, 2020

The shagbark hickories have compound leaves, usually with five leaflets—three broad ones and two smaller ones.

The oaks hold on to their green a long time, especially if they're not water-stressed. The island in Andover Lake has five species of oak—white oak, red oak, black oak, swamp white oak, and pin oak—but as of October 10, all were looking green. The reds and oranges are due to maples:



Andover Lake Island, October 10

The “white oak group” is easy to tell from the “black oak group” even when all are green in the summer: white oak leaves have softly rounded lobes, while red, black, and pin oaks have pointed lobes:



Top left: White oak

Top right: Pin oak

Bottom left: Black oak

Bottom right: Red oak (yes, it looks just like black oak when it's green!)

At this time of year, the oaks turn in sequence, with their own colors.



White Oak (*Quercus alba*), October 3

The first to turn are the white oaks. They color in a “splotchy” way—some leaves turn red here and there on a tree, while other leaves remain deep green.



“Splotchy” White Oak (*Quercus alba*) along Hop River, October 10.

Just a week or so later, the younger red oaks begin to turn uniformly crimson . . .



Red Oak (*Quercus rubrum*), Lake Road, October 10

... while the black oaks remain deep green.



Black Oak (*Quercus velutina*), Lake Road, October 10.

So if you see a splotchy red-and-green-leaved oak this week, it's probably white oak. If it's uniformly red, it's likely red oak. If it's deep green, probably black oak. But these are just probabilities—every tree is remarkably individualistic!

I do love “reading” clumps of trees and shrubs in full color, seeing how the same soil and moisture conditions produce striking differences in color expression in different species. Here are some of my favorite pics from a couple of before-noon walks on October 11.



Top: Black oak
Middle: Shagbark hickory
Bottom: White oak
Gay City, October 11



Center: White Oak (*Quercus alba*)
Surrounding: American Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*)
Gay City, October 11



Foreground: Ironwood (*Carpinus caroliniana*)
Background: Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)
Hop River, October 11

WILDFLOWER/POLLINATOR NOTES

The witch hazel has reached its “glory” point. The wiry dark branches are covered with wispy, lemon-colored flowers.



Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) blossoms, Gay City, October 11

Late-blooming asters and goldenrods are still attracting many honeybees, bumblebees, and wasps.

BIRD NOTES

- I saw/heard my first flock of Canada geese heading south October 4.
- Saw a migrant hummingbird (not one of our regulars, which left around September 19) on our fuchsias October 5.
- A flock of bluebirds in the yard October 9.
- At the sunflower feeders October 11: Purple finches, goldfinches, pine siskins, rose-breasted grosbeaks, tufted titmice, chickadees. Under the feeders: white-throated sparrows.

BUTTERFLY NOTES



Monarch on Zinnia, October 7

I'm sure this is the last of the season in my yard. Off you go, Monarch, to Mexico!

CRICKETS AND KATYDIDS

Still calling all day and into the evening.

REPTILES

I saw not one but two common watersnakes sunning on the Hebron Airline Trail as I walked. They were reluctant to move, but slithered slowly off into the grass between the trail and the marsh when I got too close.



Common Watersnake, Hebron Airline Trail, October 8.

WATERWAYS



Bridge over the Hop River at Long Hill Road, October 10

Every stream I see is entirely dry. The Hop River is still flowing, still reflecting sky and trees. But we're in a drought, and the streams and soil need rain ASAP. Rain will be sure to bring down much of the foliage when it does come. Today—more sunlight and warmth and color for us to enjoy.