

Field Notes – Last Week of August
Carrie Crompton

SEASONAL PIVOT

This has been the last week of meteorological summer. It's a time of very mixed feeling for me. I say good riddance to the heat and humidity of the dog days, which seemed doggier and longer and more exhausting than ever before in my memory. I am thankful for the refreshed clarity of the air; the wealth of green—so many different shades!—in the groundcover, the understory, and the overstory; and the vibrant music that greets my ears when I step outdoors: the buzzing of bees, the chirping of crickets, the “per-chick-o-ree”s of goldfinches, the soft rustling of flexible leaves. I think I may be hearing a few spring peepers trilling a reprise in the evenings. But I am already mourning the departures of our summer breeding season birds, the approaching end of the flowering season.

In the early afternoon, the warmth of the sunlight on my shoulder is delicious; the dark shadow before me is premonitory.



My shadow, Hebron Airline Trail, August 26, 2:00 p.m.

Since mid-April, I've been reporting on “firsts” in plant growth and development—flowering, leafing, fruiting. My attention is now on the beauty of the whole picture that has developed through the growing season. I suspect (based on nothing but visual impressions) that the landscape was at maximum chlorophyll saturation at the beginning of the fourth week of August. The goldenrods are at their most golden. Many wild berries are approaching peak edibility for migrating birds and animals preparing for hibernation. I imagine the viable seeds enclosed in ripe, perishable fruits. As squirrels store up acorns in preparation for winter, I am stashing a cache of photos to return to when my imagination needs nourishment—pictures that capture the color saturation of favorite local spots at summer's end.



Bishop Swamp, August 30. The Fragrant White Lilies are still blooming, but in smaller numbers.



Smooth Sumac (*Rhus glabra*) berries, Chamberlain Trail, August 24. Food for birds and deer.



Fox Grapes (*Vitis labrusca*), Hebron Center Trail, August 31. Not just for foxes! They're also attractive to many insect feeders (especially wasps), as well as over thirty bird species and many of the local mammals – skunks, squirrels, opossums, raccoons, and deer.

This species is the source of the cultivated Concord grape, developed in the nineteenth century by a horticulturist in Concord, Massachusetts.



Wild Raisin (*Viburnum nudum*), Hebron Airline Trail, August 26. Eaten by birds.



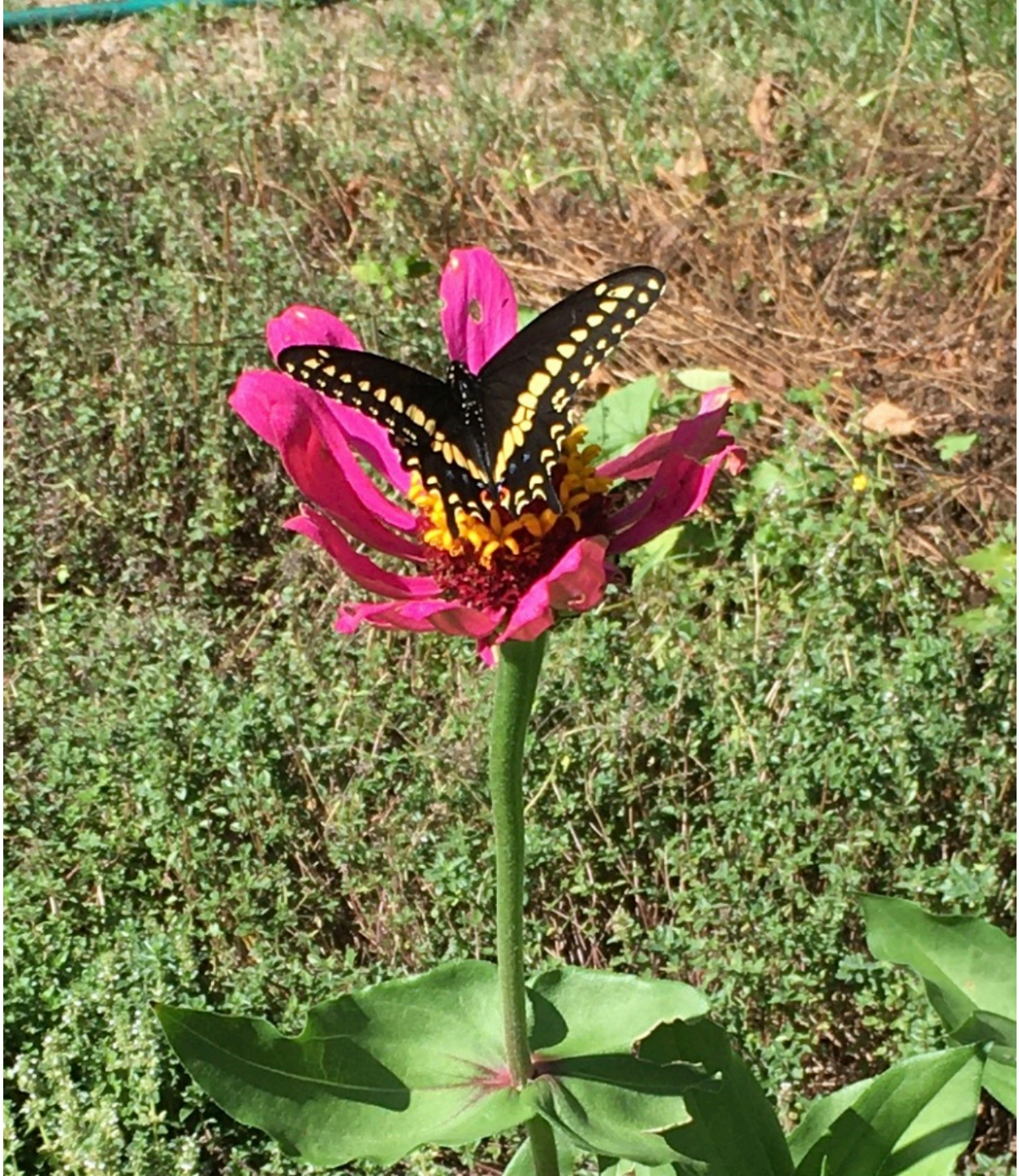
Monarch butterfly nectaring on hydrangea, our garden, July 24. I expect the individuals in our garden this week are the next-to-last generation of the summer—the ones whose progeny will migrate to Mexico. We've had two in the flower gardens every day all week. The same two? Impossible to know.



Virgin's Bower (*Clematis virginiana*), Chamberlain Trail, August 24



Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), Hebron Airline Trail, August 26. These won't last long. They are popular with many bird species.



Male Black Swallowtail on Zinnia, our yard, August 30. (The female has more blue on the wings, less yellow.)



Upper Pond, Gay City State Park, August 25. Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) in foreground.



Silky Dogwood (*Cornus amomum*) fruit, Gay City, August 26. Loved by birds.



Hop River, August 30

All summer, I have tried to take note of the plant news around Andover using my iPhone, while keeping an eye on the insects that consort with them. On my last field walk of the summer, a bumblebee visited me long enough to pose for this picture. As soon as the bee discovered that I was not a pink flower, it buzzed away. But I was delighted that it visited me for a moment.



A bumblebee visitor on my shirtsleeve. We both like the color pink.

Now begins the three-week period between the end of meteorological summer and the beginning of astronomical fall. It's like a season unto itself— still summery by and large, but with fall colors and shadows creeping in. We'll be losing a couple of minutes of daylight each day, 40 minutes in all. Ah! *Carpe dies!* Let's seize the days!