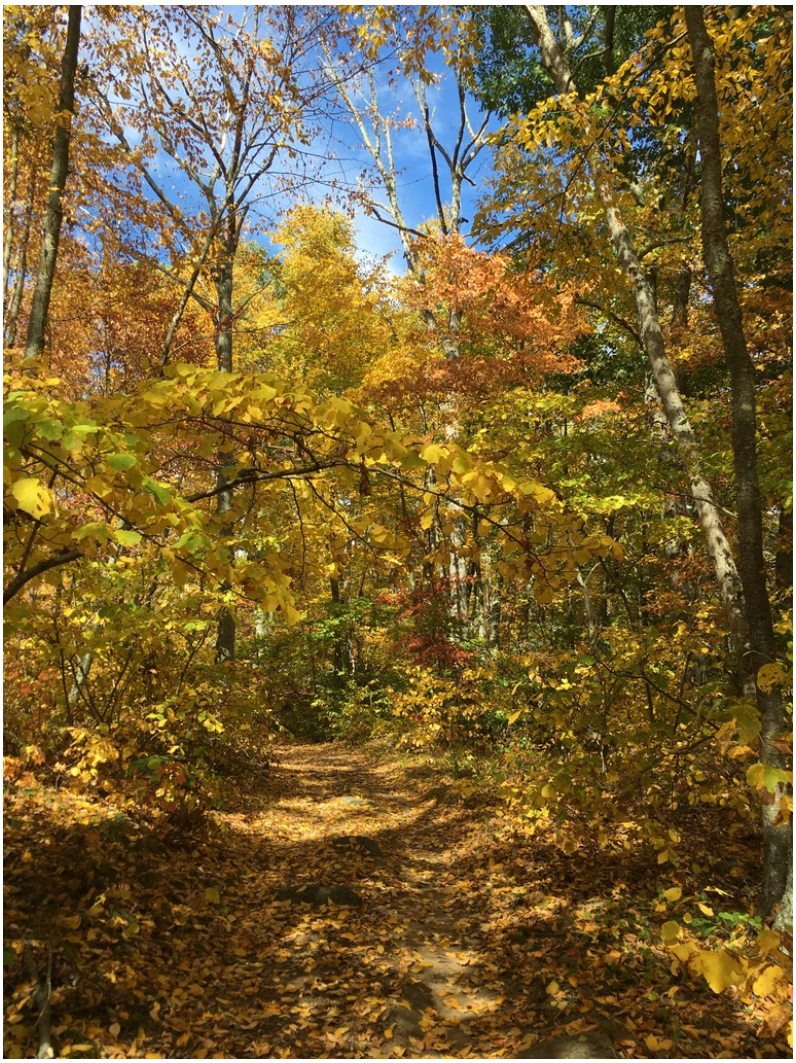
Field Notes – Last Week of September
Carrie Crompton

COLOR UPDATES

Only a week ago, it felt like late summer. The maples and birches – among the earliest trees to begin leafing out in spring – were beginning to show fall colors. The loss of chlorophyll happened very quickly. By September 26, the woods at Gay City were like a great cathedral with floor-to-ceiling stained glass windows.



White Trail, Gay City, September 26

It's not every year that we get a weekend like September 26-27, following a couple of light-frost nights, when the color peak of the maples and birches coincides with mild, bright days. It was almost miraculous, for a stretch of forty-eight hours.

The foliage along the marsh on the Airline Trail was also brightening, with yellow clethra, red blueberries, and of course, poison ivy. Never have I seen the poison ivy so luxuriously colored as this year -- nor the poison sumac!

Clethra (yellow and green), blueberry (small leaves), and poison ivy (larger yellow/orange/red leaves), Airline Trail, September 26

Poison Sumac (*Toxicodendron vernix*), Airline Trail, September 26.

Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), Airline Trail, September 26

By September 29, the understory had sparks of pink and purple:

Wild Raisin (*Viburnum nudum*), Airline Trail, September 26

Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*), Airline Trail, September 26

Shadbush (Amelianchier laevis), Hop River, September 28

Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), Chamberlain Pond, September 25

Maple-leaf Viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*), Townsend Road, September 29

White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*) sapling, Townsend Cemetery, September 29

. . . and groves of spicebush were turning gold:

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), September 28, our yard

WILDFLOWER NOTES

The asters and goldenrods continue to bloom, putting out fresh blooms every day. They're still attracting pollinators.

Heart-leaved Aster (*Symphotrichum cordifolius*)

Canada Goldenrod?

Late Purple Aster (*Symphotrichum patens*)

Small White Aster (*Symphotricum laterifolium*)

And finally, the Witch Hazel has put out its very first blossoms of the year. For a wildflower lover, this is always a bittersweet moment. This is the last flower of the year. Along with the asters, it will continue to bloom for several weeks more. It will, amazingly, attract pollinators and set fruit, which will ripen next summer, mature next fall.

Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), Gay City, September 26

Here is what Thoreau had to say about the witch hazel:

Thoreau: October 9, 1851.

"The witch-hazel here is in full blossom on this magical hillside, while its broad yellow leaves are falling. It is an extremely interesting plant—October and November's child, and yet reminds me of the very earliest spring. Its blossoms smell like the spring . . . While its leaves fall, its blossoms spring. The autumn, then, is indeed a spring.

The witch hazel community in Gay City, on the east side of the pond, is remarkably colorful and interesting right now, with its yellow leaves, fresh yellow flowers, almost-open flower buds, leaf buds, leaves, and fruits all present at the same time.

BUTTERFLY NOTES

I saw a Monarch fluttering through the yard as recently as September 28. Was that the last one?

BIRD NOTES

Hummers have left. Catbirds have left. Phoebes are still here. Cormorants still on the Lake. Yellow-rumped warblers passing through.

CRICKET AND KATYDID NOTES

Still heard every day. Katydids were calling in the morning on September 28. That seemed unusual.

BEE NOTES

The bumblebees I'm seeing on goldenrods and asters these days are most likely mated queens. They'll soon be looking for underground hibernation quarters. Carpenter bees are busy in the gardens.

MORE COLOR TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Watching the canopy change is like watching a sunset; it changes even as you exclaim over it.

The birches and maples have passed their peak in Andover, but the oaks, hickories and beeches are still mostly green. I saw some yellow hickory just this morning . . .

Shagbark Hickory, Townsend Road, September 30