

BOREAL BITS

PHIL BURKE



JUNE TALES – Part 2

'If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome.' Charlotte Bronte

No discussion of Junes past would be complete without a mention of the one of the most devastating meteorological events this area has endured during the sixth month of the year. This is the windstorm of the evening of June 10, 2002 that did an incredible amount of damage, most of which took the form of uprooted trees. Four inches of rain within the previous two days softened the ground contributing to the number of blow downs. Within a square kilometre I had logged and been observing three active eagle nests, an osprey nest and a heron colony or rookery consisting of at least 60 active nests. The eagles and the osprey nests survived but the heron colony was decimated. To this date I have been unable to determine the new location of the colony, if indeed, a new colony was built. It is possible that the adults joined existing colonies the following spring. It would have been too late to rebuild that year.

Ravens and crows are inveterate nest raiders. A raven showed great interest in a large spruce across the road. Then it entered the foliage and cleaned out a nest of chicks while the smaller parents (unidentifiable from a distance) flew helplessly and frantically trying to drive the attacker away. When the raven had finished its meal, it hopped to the end of a bough, wiped its beak clean on the branch and flew away. Nature is indeed cruel.



Photo Phil Burke

Last week we talked about a crow mobbing an eagle. Often mobbers are mobbed themselves as happened one June when an eagle left its nest and was spied by a raven that gave chase. Two crows saw the action, and ever ready to do some mobbing of their own, begin to pursue the raven. The eagle eventually landed and the raven, assuming it had done its job, left. However, the two crows weren't quite ready to call it quits and continued harassing the eagle for a few minutes. Mobbing is particularly noticeable during breeding season.

June sees the bush (forest) come into flower. Purple vetch is in bloom along with creamy pea-vine. We saw a few tiger lilies and bunchberry blossoms along with a profusion of ox eye daisies, and various yellow

flowers. In June we have the largest growth spurt of the year, when millions of plants begin the race for their share of sunlight to grow and reproduce. With the profusion of plant life comes the profusion of insect life, overlapping nicely with bird hatchlings whose parents must find quick protein to stuff the hungry maws. It is no accident that these events coincide.



Photo Phil Burke

June is the month of insects. We will spend no time here on the pestiferous army worm (forest tent caterpillar). But where there is plant life in abundance, there is an abundance of life forms that feed on it. Spittle bugs are sucking the sap from plants beneath cover of foamy froth, young grasshoppers emerge to begin a carefree life of eating, leaf miners are leaving trails in the otherwise perfect tissue of the aspen leaves, frogs grow fat on the myriad of moths and other flying insects that frequent ponds and other damp areas, swallows and nighthawks swoop and soar trapping the caddis flies and hundreds of other insect species, warblers glean the forest for caterpillars, and a family of crows brings June beetles to our bird bath to soften them for eating. When the crows leave, all that is left of the beetles are the tough bronze wing covers.

A few years ago I received a call from Chris Lee who narrated a story about an eagle and loon. It was a high water year on the lake and a pair of loons had nested on the shore but high enough to be out of danger. An eagle landed nearby on a beaver lodge. The male loon who was in the water called a warning to the female on the nest and then dove. Seconds later it emerged with great force near the beaver lodge frightening the eagle away. It was a good move by the loon. Clark Anderson tells of loon chicks being taken by eagles.

We are rapidly approaching the summer solstice after which our hours of daylight will begin to shrink. It hardly seems fair.