



CORNELL LAB of
ORNITHOLOGY

Autumn

Trail Guide to Sapsucker Woods



Native dogwoods are among the first trees to change color in fall. As their leaves turn a burnt red, their whitish berries serve as bright advertisements to fruit-eating birds such as **catbirds**, waxwings, and warblers. After digesting the fruit, the birds leave droppings in new areas, dispersing the seeds.

Great Blue Herons stealthily stalk prey, such as fish and frogs, in the pond's shallow margins. They also hunt for mice and voles in nearby agricultural fields. Herons continue to visit the pond as long as they can find open water for foraging. They depart by early December and return in early spring.

Though beautiful and unique, **common teasel** is considered a noxious weed in New York. Native to Europe, teasels were imported in the 1800s for combing wool. They have been naturalized in many regions and are now found in wet edge habitats.

Goldenrod is a common plant in wetlands and old agricultural fields. If you look closely among the many stems you will find the round "ball galls" of the gall fly. Chickadees and **Downy Woodpeckers** sometimes peck holes in the galls to extract the tasty larvae hidden within.

Some common plants are "invasive" species that are not native to Sapsucker Woods, including bush honeysuckle and buckthorn. **Bush honeysuckle** is blanketed in juicy red berries and greenish yellow leaves. Buckthorn has dark blue-black berries and dark green leaves.

The end of summer is marked by the delicate orange flowers and swollen seed pods of **jewelweed**, also known as "touch-me-not." The name refers to the explosive nature of the light green seed pods which, when fully ripe, are spring-loaded to disperse their seeds at the slightest touch.

The yellow-legged meadowhawk is a common fall dragonfly that is often active even in December. Contrary to its name, the legs can be yellow, brown, or even reddish. This sit-and-wait predator basks on sunny perches around the pond's edge, waiting to zip out and snatch an unwary insect flying by.

Fall is a beautiful season to visit Sapsucker Woods.
The trees are alive with colors and migrating birds, and hundreds of Canada Geese roost on the pond each night. As days grow colder, animals prepare for winter by eating more, storing food, hibernating, or migrating south.
If you have enjoyed our trails, please consider becoming a member of the Lab. Information is available in the Visitors' Center or at www.birds.cornell.edu.

In the warm days of early fall, **green frogs** bask in shallow water or on logs. As the days get colder, the frogs move to the muddy bottoms of ponds and become dormant for the winter.

As you walk on our mulched paths, you can see **gray squirrels** busily hiding acorns for the winter. The abundance of hickory, oak, and beech trees provide squirrels, turkeys, and Blue Jays with food to survive the cold months ahead.

Fungi often grow on dead trees and fallen branches. They play an important role in recycling nutrients by decomposing dead plants and animals.

Magnolia Warblers are flashy members of flocks of warblers migrating to Central America and the Caribbean from the boreal forests. Watch their acrobatic flights as they glean small insects and spiders from the fall foliage before continuing their journey south.

Hummocks are mounds of soil that form around the base of trees as the landscape floods and drains over a long time. They increase biodiversity by providing habitat for plants and animals that are less tolerant of wet conditions.

Autumn's beautiful changes in leaf color can vary across years. In general, sunny dry locations tend to change before shady moist sites, treetops before bottoms, and trees in open areas before those in forests. You can see this pattern by comparing the colorful trees at the pond's edge with the green interior of the forest.

