

This Week in the Woods August: Week Two

AUGUST: WEEK TWO



Leaf roll



Black swallowtail on goldenrod



Ornate-stalked bolete



Jelly babies



Cedar waxwing



Blackberry



Jewelweed



Osmoderma beetle



Meadowhawk

This Week in the Woods we've been noticing **leaf rolls** on sugar maples and other hardwood tree species – single leaves that are wrapped up tightly like rolled cigars. These are often the work of moth larvae – especially tortricid moths – and serve as feeding shelters. If you unroll one of these structures, you may find a grub, along with a whole lot of frass (insect poop). Here's a [YouTube video demonstration](#) of how to unroll a leaf. (Note: while this is a cool activity with kids, one does feel a little guilty undoing all the insect's hard work.)

In August and September, many species of **goldenrod** brighten the meadows and roadsides, and provide critical food for pollinators, including **black swallowtails**. As Meghan McCarthy McPhaul notes in this [Outside Story essay](#), black swallowtail caterpillars have several clever defenses against would-be predators, including mimicry of both bird poop and (toxic) monarch caterpillars at different stages of their development. The species also produces two different colors of chrysalis, depending on the season. Summer chrysalises are green, while, “those [caterpillars] pupating later in the season...do so in autumn brown.” Here’s a second [Outside Story article](#), by Joe Rankin, focused on goldenrod.

Boletes, the “fleshy pore fungi,” are popping up all over the woods. Look for caps with spongy undersides (not gills). Often the stems will have a network of raised ridges. **Ornate-stalked bolete** is fairly common. According to Timothy Baroni in *Mushrooms of the Northeastern United States and Canada*, this mushroom is often associated with oak, beech, and birch stands. Many specimens, such as the one pictured, are distinctive for the contrast between their grayish-brown caps and bright yellow stems. (If you break the stem, you’ll see it’s the same color all the way through). Here’s a [link from mushroomexpert.com](#) with more information about boletes.

We have also found several clusters of **jelly babies**, also called jelly clubs, growing in the woods this week. Although their tops resemble classic mushroom caps, these fungi (multiple species) are actually part of the earth tongue group. Here’s a [profile on jelly babies](#) from the Missouri Department of Conservation.

As other summer birdsong in the woods has subsided, the high-pitched calls of **cedar waxwings** have become more noticeable. You rarely hear just one; they tend to chase each other around the canopy, and they also frequently appear in field edges. As berries become more plentiful, look for them swarming shrubs and trees. Here’s a [profile from the Cornell Ornithology Lab](#), including an audio file of a cedar waxwing’s call. See also this [article by writer \(and poet\) Kateri Kosek](#), describing a 1908 lobbying effort by Vermont fruit growers for permission to slaughter cedar waxwings, and an aesthetics-based reprieve; “Once the senators laid eyes on the birds, no other arguments were needed, and the bill was dropped.”

Raspberries are on their way out, but **blackberries** are just getting started. You may find more than one kind growing in a meadow or sunny patch of woods. Common blackberry is (surprise) one of the most commonly occurring species. The plants are a boon to wildlife both as food and shelter. Here’s [an Outside Story article](#) by Rachel (Sargent) Mirus, who notes that blackberries are not true berries, but “aggregate fruits made up of juicy little spheres called drupelets.”

Osmoderma beetles are on the prowl, and can be intimidating. Their bodies are about an inch long (there are several species), and they have waggly legs – it isn’t the most pleasant experience

when one comes trundling out to share your space under a shade tree. However, they're harmless, other than, allegedly, emitting an unpleasant smell if you are daring enough to pick one up (we've never tried it). Here's a [profile from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Field Station's "Bug Lady."](#) Their larvae live in tree holes and rotten wood.

Despite its delicate appearance, **jewelweed** is a scrappy late summer wildflower that thrives in a variety of locations, from moist streambanks to sunny roadsides. Its leaves contain a compound with anti-inflammatory properties that may help to soothe poison ivy rashes. Here's a [species profile from The Native Plant Trust](#), which notes that an alternative name for the plant, "spotted touch-me-not," refers to the way that its seed pods pop open at the slightest touch. Triggering seed pods is fun activity for kids, by the way. Here's a [video of "exploding seed pods" on YouTube](#).

Late summer meadows are abuzz with medium-sized, bright red dragonflies. These are **meadowhawks**, of one kind or another, and as noted by Dennis Paulson in *Dragonflies and Damselflies of the East*, some species aren't dependent on permanent water bodies for reproduction. Instead, they "lay their eggs on dry ground, with hatching after winter rains [or snow] fill temporary ponds." Here's a [link to a profile](#) (including a gorgeous photograph by Bryan Pfeiffer) of a common meadowhawk in our region, the cherry-faced meadowhawk. The profile is part of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies' [Vermont Atlas of Life](#).

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