



DISHMAN HILLS NATURAL AREA ASSOCIATION
3415 S. LINCOLN DRIVE, SPOKANE, WA 99203, 509 747-8147

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LIGHTS AND SHADOWS from the Dishman Hills, October, 2001

MEMORY LANE

From our collection of Lights and Shadows here is clip from an past edition that captures the season. The year is 1991. The month is October. A long dry, and hot Fall season has just ended with an abrupt, stormy change that resulted in dozens of forest and grass fires caused by downed power lines, an event known as Firestorm 91. Dishman Hills Natural Area was spared these devastating fires, but not so on Tower Mountain where flames and smoke were still rising as this article was being written. Tom chose to write about the wondrous evolution of a summer forest awake to a winter forest asleep rather than the combustion of the same.

Autumn
by Tom Rogers

"Brown leaves rustle at each footfall" wrote a would-be poet high school boy. Brown leaves are here now but lack of heavy frosts has left many green leaves still on the trees. Right now this is changing. By the time you receive this we may have had some rain, long overdue, to moisten the tinder-dry forest and grasslands.

Wildflowers are practically gone, except for some hardy weeds: spotted knapweed (which is attracting painted lady butterflies) and tansy. A few wild asters linger. Pearly everlasting is living up to its name as its dry flowers persist. But the wild autumn fruits put on a show: the smoky blue of elderberry clusters, the red and oranges of roses and our native mountain ash shrubs.

We are now in the autumn "Bird vacuum", when nearly all the summer birds have left and few or no winter birds have arrived.. Robins are restless. Whether or not it will be a "robin winter" may depend on the food supply. The mountain ash berry crop, a staple of in their winter diet, looks heavy. A group of varied thrushes ("Oregon robins") was seen on Tower Mountain recently. Last winter they were common in residential areas of the Spokane Valley. Golden-crowned kinglets are trickling in.

For butterflies and other insects the days are numbered. November 1 has been the cutoff date for the former in the past years. A few painted ladies ("thistle butterflies") and sulfurs are still around. Angewings and mourning cloaks will hibernate. Grasshoppers are becoming inactive and will soon succumb but the proverbial industrious ants will retire to their underground nest. The big yellowjacket population will be disappearing, only the fertile queens seeking wintering crannies. Field crickets and snowy tree crickets are still chirping it up, though slowed by the cooler weather. (It is said that the latter, which chirp intermittently, can give you a rough estimate of the temperature (Fahrenheit) if you count the number of chirps in thirteen seconds and add forty to it).

STEP BY STEP

The next step in our quest to protect the northern side of the Natural Area from the damaging effects of development will be taken at our appeal hearing on November 13th, 2 pm, at the consul chamber in the basement of the Public Works building. While the hearing is open to the public, there will be no public input allowed. We hope to convince commissioners that the protection of unique natural settings and valuable community resources is more important than keeping the "flood gates" of commercial development open full wide everywhere all the time. Development and urban forest must learn to accommodate each other. Expect a full report of the results of this hearing in next months newsletter.

ORGANIZATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have any questions. We have a October meeting the third Tuesday of the month at Opportunity Elementary School, in the teacher's lounge, S. 1109 Wilbur, 7pm.

The following are our September donors that have consented to be listed: Jon Barstad, Myrna Cliff, Robert Damon, Frieda Foth, Wilbert & Gladys Fritz, Don & Inga Griffiths, Hans & Kathryn Krauss, Vernon & Gloria Krebs, Helen Lininger, John & Marilyn Miller, Stephen Peterson, Jane Rogers, Spokane Valley Kiwanis Club, Jan Strohbeck, Beth Tietjan, Whitworth Belles Garden Club, Barney & Jeanne Wilson, and two anonymous donors. Your generosity is very appreciated.

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