

## A Turn of Seasons:

The chickadees are devouring the seeds, the seeds of flowers and the seeds of weeds, all the seeds. They are ravenous. I watched today as one of them perched at the top of a long stem filled with peckable bounty. As he did so his weight bent the stem almost to the ground where four of his cohorts were waiting to browse the now eye-height bough of plenty. Picked it clean, they did. I was duly impressed.

Then it was the robins' turn. We are at the borderline of the territory in which they can winter over. I am looking forward to their unfolding story. A large pack of them, twenty or thirty has been visiting our turf for a week or two now. They are particularly fond of the mature white berries found in abundance on the rough-leafed dogwoods. I have been diligent for the past three years in encouraging the proliferation of the dogwood, giving them more space and sun, restraining their competition. . We support several varieties here, each with their specific bloom and berry. There are few smiles more satisfying than the smile that comes with work rewarded. Encourage the flora, watch the fauna that follows. Nice.

I think that the Eastern Flicker may be the handsomest of our avian browsers. I know, I know, that's a mouthful to utter when you consider the variety of our residents. There are easily a dozen local species who might well take exception to my statement. I wouldn't blame them but I would argue my position, forcefully. If you don't know the bird, imagine a brown and white woodpecker with that marvelous woodpecker herringbone jacket. It's about the size of a red-bellied and almost the same shape. But when he turns to face you he presents a shield stamped right in the middle of his breast. It's remarkably similar in shape to the shield on Superman's chest. You know, the one that holds his "S". And when he turns away he shows a bright red patch at the nape of his neck. Very sporty.

The real reason I bring him up is not to instigate a brawl over which is the handsomest bird but rather to let you know that his favorite morsel is also the fruit of the dogwood. There is a pair of flickers and there are dozens of robins. I wonder if they'll take turns. Stay tuned.

The nights are getting colder and flurries have appeared. I can see across our valley now, for the first time since middle-spring. The trees reveal their wooden shapes and the landscape is made more of light and shadow than of foliage. The last of the fall color is clinging to its perch and most of it has turned a hundred shades of bronze and brown. A single sunset evening in the valley would cement for all time, even in the least imaginative of mental palettes, that brown is beautiful. That brown, not black, is all the colors rolled into one, stirred and handed back to us, warm.

If the world were ruled by hickories and oaks, Crayola would produce a 64 pack of crayons, all in shades of brown. And children would tell their Grandmas, "Look Grammy, I made a picture for you, of the trees. Guess how many colors I used." The picture would be in copper and bronze and umber (burnt and raw) and sienna and ochre and puce and chocolate and more; and it would be marvelous.

After last night's hard freeze the tenacious hold that yellow leaves had on their birch and hackberry hosts was finally weakened so that this morning, with the lightest of breezes, they floated directly down. Twisting and sashaying, holding buoyant for just an instant, they waltz to the forest floor and enter their new cycle, becoming soil. The cold air is full of them and the atmosphere has turned golden. It's rather like standing in a glass of beer except the bubbles don't rise; they descend. Lovely.

It's really quite something that this change of air, this slide towards sleep should be a surprise every year. I suppose it's a testament to our capacity for wonder or maybe the cycles, their duration measured in months, is exactly the time it takes humans to forget, and then again be dazzled, by a turn of seasons.