

C H A U T A U Q U A



BIRD  
TREE  
&  
GARDEN  
CLUB



## What's in Bloom?

By Betsy Burgeson  
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Well it's October 19<sup>th</sup> and I am sitting here in my office watching the SNOWFLAKES fly (yes you read that right...it's snowing like CRAZY today!!!).

However, for the past two weeks I have been enjoying the view across the street as the mesmerizing kaleidoscope of fall has been in full effect. The colors of the leaves this year are spectacular - the most vivid I can ever remember. Every tree looks like a rainbow with every hue & shade all at the same time and every turn I take on the grounds seems to lead to a more dazzling view. I feel like a kid again out wandering through the gardens collecting leaves with irresistible color combinations that I just want to show off in some way. So far, I just have a very large collection of pressed leaves that will most likely all turn brown. I will find them in a few years and wonder what on earth these were from, but for today they are my way of capturing this moment of time in my memory.

I heard a word the other day that I had to look up to re-learn the actual meaning of – **PHANTASMAGORIC** (def.): wild and shifting images, colorful patterns that are continually moving and changing, a bizarre or fantastic combination, collection, or assemblage.

There truly couldn't be a more perfect word to describe the star of the autumn leaf color show - the **SUMAC (*Rhus sp.*)**. It's not only a stunning beauty, but it also has incredible ecological value as well.

Again, something I didn't truly grasp until I attended one of **Jack Gulvin's nature walks**. He spoke of the **importance of sumac to birds, especially bluebirds**, and I knew this was a plant that I wanted to learn more about and encourage throughout the grounds.

There are 3 main species of sumac that naturally grow in this area: **Smooth (*Rhus glabra*)**, **Staghorn (*Rhus typhina*)**, & **Aromatic (*Rhus aromatica*)**. The latter two have cultivars that are less aggressive than the species and work well in garden settings. 'Tiger Eyes' is a shorter more compact variety of staghorn with finely "cut," feather-like leaves and intense fall colors. It is the one in the photo at the top of the page.

'Grow -Low' fragrant sumac is a great ground cover that can also help stabilize soil on slopes (see photos below).

Just as I did in my last article, here are a few amazing facts and reasons to love sumac:

- Sumac is a native plant in the **CASHEW** family - Anacardiaceae.
- Don't be afraid of sumacs! Staghorn, smooth, and fragrant sumac are not harmful to skin. They **do not contain urushiol** - the oil that is in poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac (*Toxicodendron vernix*). As you can tell from the scientific name, poison sumac is a very different plant from the sumacs growing here in Chautauqua. In fact, you are unlikely to ever encounter poison sumac, as it is a wetland plant and has very specific growing conditions.
- Sumac berries remain on branches into the winter and sometimes the spring, making sumac especially important during times of food scarcity. In winter **bluebirds naturally switch from an insect-centered diet to a fruit-centered diet and rely on the lingering sumac fruit for survival.**
- **300 species of birds** including mockingbirds, robins, crows, and bluebirds incorporate the fruit of staghorn sumac into their diet.
- **Sumac is one tough plant** that can adapt to almost any type of environmental condition. It is excellent for stabilizing banks and slopes.
- Historically, the fruit (actually, the "hair" covering the fruit) has been used to make a **lemony citrus-flavored drink**. Sumac-ade anyone?
- Leaves of sumac are used as a source of **black ink** while the stems make a **yellow dye**.
- Bark and leaves of sumac are **rich source of tannins** that are used for the tanning of leather.
- Sumac was once used as a treatment for half a dozen different ailments in **medieval medicine**
- Stems of sumac have soft central parts that are easily removed. Certain types of **carpenter bees** hollow them out and use the tunnels for larval nests
- Sumac is a larval host plant of the **Luna moth and the Spring Azure Butterfly.**

- The **PHANTASMAGORIC** fall color of sumac should be enough to entice anyone to add one or 27 to their gardens!

Hopefully these interesting tidbits have inspired you to see sumac in a new light. In my opinion, the best light to see sumac in is mid-morning on a sunny day in early October. As the snow continues to fall, I am looking forward to the next sunny day to get out and enjoy the captivating colors of Sumac throughout the Institution

A couple of good reads:

[Birds Rely on Sumac](#) article from 2018 Post Journal

A lighthearted, fun AND EDUCATIONAL read from the Cayuga Nature Center:

[Biodiversity Lessons from Bluebirds](#)

- all sumac photos and text by Betsy B. (What can't she do?)



The photos above and below this caption are the leaves of the Low-Gro, showing lovely fall color in Chautauqua.



And the familiar staghorn sumac above and below this caption.



**What's  
in  
Flight?**

*Note from your Editor:*

*Actually the dragons and damsels are no longer in flight. Most are overwintering as larvae in the lake. Some are overwintering as eggs tucked away in a variety of places, but none are flying around as mature, winged adults as the title and photo clearly suggest.*

*Dennis wrote this article back in the summer when they WERE in flight, but we were waiting to publish the article until we had the perfect photo to accompany it....And now we have it! (And it's not a photo of larvae - you're welcome!)*

*Many thanks to **Jeanne Wiebenga** who provided the photo of a young female skimmer dragonfly.*

*Actually, to be a bit more precise, here's what Dennis said about the photo: "The technical term for a newly emerged adult (winged) dragonfly is 'teneral.' It's hard to tell from this image if the dragonfly is a **Widow Skimmer** or a **12-spotted Skimmer** (they're the most common at that site), but **it's definitely a skimmer**. The wings are always **shiny and untattered in tenerals**."*

*~ Leslie Renjilian*

## **Dragons and Damsels**

**by Dennis McNair**  
**BTG Entomologist**

**Dragonflies and damselflies are closely related** by biologists in their classification as member of the insect order Odonata (=odonates).

They are all **predaceous throughout their lives**, spend the immature part of their life cycle in fresh water, and **only emerge as flying adults when they are ready to mate and lay eggs**.

**Adults may live from a week or so to over a year** but their immature stages

may live **2 or 3 years in the water before emerging as winged adults.**

**Dragonflies** are **robust and are fast fliers** with their first and second pair of **wings differing in size and shape.**

**Damselflies**, on the other hand, are generally smaller and much more **slender**, are generally feeble fliers (**flutterers**), and **have similar fore- and hind-wings.**

**Neither dragonflies nor damselflies can sting**, although some may feign stinging by appearing to oviposit (lay eggs) on humans when held.

Larger dragonflies can also **grip our skin with their claws**, but I've never had one draw blood, even though I've handled thousands of them. (My grandmother told me that they would darn my mouth shut if I lied, but I've fibbed a lot over my lifetime and have yet to suffer that consequence.)

In my opinion, they are among the most **beautiful and graceful of the insects**, an opinion apparently shared by the famous glass artist, **Louis Comfort Tiffany**, especially in his fashioning of glass lampshades.

Odonates have **remarkably fine vision**. For instance, they see motion much better than we do. **Human flicker fusion varies from 10-15 Hz** (cycles per second) for red-green images up to 35-60 for black and white images. It largely depends on how fast we can reconstitute visual pigments (*rhodopsin* for black-and-white vision and *photopsin* for color) in the cells in our retina.

Dragonflies use several different (and faster) visual pigments and can have a **flicker fusion of about 300 Hz**. That means that a movie appearing to us to be of continuous motion would appear to a dragonfly as a series of still photographs shown in quick succession, or that movement in their environment would appear to them to be happening in slow motion.

Also, dragonflies and damselflies have very large eyes and **can see almost 360 degrees**, while humans can see less than 180. Additionally, the variety of dragonfly visual pigments allows them to differentiate **minute varieties of color** in their surroundings.



All of these things make them great hunters – studies have shown dragonflies to have nearly a **98% success rate at capturing prey on the wing** – and also allows them to evade capture by people wanting to study their anatomy in close detail.

Speaking of predation, dragonflies are particularly effective in **removing mosquitoes**. A large adult dragonfly may **consume hundreds of mosquito** adults in one day (up to 15% of the dragonfly's body weight), and that doesn't count the **mosquito larvae** that immature dragonflies consume during the aquatic part of their life cycle.

**They also eat other pesky bugs** associated with their habitat (around water) including midges (“**lake flies**”) and **black flies**. Damselflies aren't quite as voracious, probably because they don't fly as much, but are very effective at removing insects from aquatic plants.

**I could go on for hours** about my favorite group of insects (and I will, if you give me an opportunity!), but suffice it to say that these splendid arial acrobats and arrestingly monstrous-looking aquatic predators have given me and other biologists thousands of hours of enjoyable observation and millions of instances of frustration trying to catch them.

Much remains to be learned about odonates and they are **great subjects for amateur naturalists**. When the birds become harder to see as they move onto their nests in late spring to incubate and raise their young, **birders have all the equipment they need (binoculars, mosquito repellent, field clothes, etc.) to shift to observing these lovely and conspicuous odonates**.

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**What's  
in  
the Works?**

We have a few exciting things in the works here at BTG Off-Season Headquarters!

The **BTG Osprey Committee** (yup, that's a thing!) is collaborating with the **Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy** and the **Chautauqua Golf Club** to erect two osprey platforms this winter.

The platforms will be outfitted with some "**starter sticks**" for young osprey returning to their birthplace to make a new home with themselves and their mate.

**Twan Leenders of the CWC and Jeanne Wiebenga** reckon that at least 15 young osprey fledged from nests around Chautauqua Lake in the last two years. That means at least **5-7 young adults will return to our lake** next summer, but they cannot live with their parents now that they are grown (humans know that's not a good idea!) so they will make nests of their own. Providing platforms helps to ensure they won't choose the top of a live-wire utility pole.

Thanks to **generous pledges from two BTG Life Members and with the help of National Grid, the CWC will install the platforms for the young birds**. PLUS, again with the help of the CWC, and certainly with much frustration and swearing, the **BTG Technology Committee** plans to install an **Osprey Cam** on the nest and stream the feed to our website. **Stay tuned and cross your fingers!**

Our **Program Committee** is already hard at work assembling next season's program. We will preview the **2023 program** in a spring newsletter so that you can mark up your calendar with must-see BTG events.

And the **Finance Committee** is gearing up for our **First Annual Fundraiser**. As those of you who attended the Annual Lunch in the Athenaeum Parlor in August already know, the board voted to **discontinue annual dues effective in 2023**. This was a scary move as the Club has collected dues to cover day-to-day expenses since its founding in 1913. However, we have found that years cycle around too often these days and that paying annual dues is an irksome

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task. So instead of dues in 2023, this fall we will launch our first **annual donation campaign to raise money for our 2023 operating expenses and special projects**. Look for an email about that in **November and *please consider giving!*** (Or if you're ready to give right now before we even come up with the pretty language and catchy campaign title, go right ahead and click below or mail your check!)

To my absolute horror, there is now a video of the annual report that I gave at the luncheon on our brand-new [YouTube channel](#). I can't vouch for it as I could only watch only a few seconds, but if you missed the meeting and want to hear a nasally voice and lots of "ums" while looking at a nice power point, [click here](#).

Sadly, we do not have a video from that day of **Jeanne Wiebenga's amazing talk *The Return of the Osprey to Chautauqua Lake***, which IS a talk I would LOVE to see over and over again, but don't worry - we have plans to film Jeanne at our next opportunity!

Huge thanks to **Galen May** for her help creating the Annual Luncheon Power Point last summer and for editing and uploading the video this month.

~ Leslie Renjilian

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