



Nature Notes

Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve

Your nature guide for the week August 2–August 8

While some might say that summer has yet to get started in earnest this year, the onset of goldenrod flowering signals that it is already in decline.



Wildflowers

The start of **goldenrod** flowering this week means that a changing of the guard is about to happen in earnest in the Preserve. Till now, the meadows have been dominated by introduced species, particularly Queen Anne's Lace (also known as Wild Carrot) and Sweet-clover, both white-flowered. The goldenrods join other native species with yellow flowers such as **Cup Plant**, **Woodland Sunflower**, and **Grey-headed Coneflower**.

It is a bittersweet transition however, as the onset of goldenrod blooms also signals the beginning of the end for summer. Folklore has it that an early goldenrod blooming presages an early winter. Goldenrod flowering also alerts us to the impending flowering of **Ragweed**—the true culprit of late summer hay fever. Goldenrod is insect-pollinated and its sticky, heavy pollen grains are rarely airborne. Ragweed, on the other hand, is wind-pollinated and in hot and windy conditions the tiny pollen grains can travel for kilometres. If August or September weather (peak flowering time for Ragweed) continues the July trend, and is humid and wetter than usual, then Ragweed dispersal will be reduced as the pollen grains are weighed down with moisture—good news for allergy sufferers.

In the swamp portions of the woodland trail, native **Spotted Jewelweed** is flowering. The speckled orange flowers look like trumpets dangling beneath the leaves. An introduced species, **Himalayan Balsam** which is related to the native jewelweeds and is also in the **Touch-Me-Not** family, has invaded the swamps at Todmorden and become an unwanted guest. Its pink flowers are almost twice the size of those of Spotted Jewelweed, and it towers over the native species.



Insects

The cool and rainy weather this summer has curtailed butterfly activity somewhat, but on a hot day the swift-flying **Red Admiral** butterfly can usually be seen around the woodland edges or in the meadow. Perched with wings open, the deep red bands crossing the dark wings are distinctive. As often as not though, Red Admirals perch with closed wings and the underside pattern is mottled brown and very cryptic. While this year appears to be quite good for Red Admirals, local population size can vary dramatically from year to year. In 2002 Toronto entomologists wondered where they had gone; Red Admiral numbers were one-tenth or less of the previous year's counts.

Muddy puddles at the construction site at the north end of the Paper Mill have provided **Mud Dauber Wasps** with perfect nest-building material. Mud Daubers come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours; a common species has long black and yellow legs and the characteristic “thin waist”. The female uses her mandibles to scrape wet mud up from the edge of the puddle, works it into a ball, then carries it off to the nest-site which is usually in the eaves of a building. She builds a chambered nest with mud and provisions it with grasshoppers and spiders she has caught and immobilized. The prey will provide food for her larvae.

The **European Fire Ant** is very active in the Preserve at present. This species is quite aggressive, and female workers will sting if you disturb them. We recommend staying on the formal trail, wearing long pants tucked into socks, and spraying repellent on boots.

More Info

For more information about the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve, please visit the Preserve Web site (www.hopscotch.ca/tmwp), or contact the Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum (Tel: 416 396-2819).

Nature Notes is researched and written by Mike Dennison and Alejandro Lynch, and is published in print and online formats by Hopscotch Interactive Inc. For more information on **Nature Notes** and other services provided by Hopscotch please visit their Web site (<http://www.hopscotch.ca>).