

**Natural Events**  
**September**  
**GSWA Ecological Restoration Site**



**Swamp Darner laying eggs on woody debris within the ditch**

- 1) Walk over the small bridge and stand near the kiosk that welcomes you to the restoration site. Now breathe deep and inhale the natural effluvium that is Mother Nature's exhale. If you were here in July and performed this very same exercise you would have noticed a distinct olfactory difference. This is because in September the rate of biological activity in the soil is peaking. Microbes in unfathomable numbers are working overtime to break down the cellular components of all things dead. This whaf is a welcome reminder that fall is starting to knock on summer's back door. Take it in before you start your journey.
- 2) Speaking of decay, don't hesitate to count the numbers and varieties of mushrooms that poke their heads out of the ground this month. If August rains were present than mushrooms can be plentiful in September. One obvious year round mushroom you will find on old logs lining the tails is the turkey tail. This polypore mushroom (mushrooms found on dead and living trees) is aptly named for its resemblance to the pattern on the tail feathers of wild turkey
- 3) One of my favorite mushrooms has been known to occur on this site – "Chicken of the Woods" – identified by its existence on dead tree stumps and logs – tawny orange – stalkless - with wavy cap and yellow pores underneath. Called chicken of the woods because it's considered to be a prized edible. Use caution – never eat mushrooms that an expert in the field has not identified for you – we don't allow dead people on the property.
- 4) More often the signs and tracks of fox and coyote can be found on our restoration site than the actual sighting of these magnificent canines. They might not let you see them but they certainly want you to know their here. Foxes do this by means of demarcating their territory with scat (a fancy term for feces). You will find these deposits on most trails and especially on the bridge crossings. Fox and coyote will do this to avoid direct confrontation with each other. This is a way of saying "this is my neck of the woods – beware – keep out!" You can tell the difference between coyote and red fox by the size and the shape of the scat. Coyote scat is 3 – 5 inches long with a tapered end. It tends to be thicker and more log shaped than red fox. Red fox scat takes on a smaller form and is more twisted than coyote. Most fox scat has the remnant of bone and hair in it which gives them a fibrous texture – not very yummy but helpful in keying them out with other non-carnivorous mammals.
- 5) The meadow of ironweed, boneset and goldenrod is still abuzz with insect and spider activity. See if you can identify the September newcomers to our sumptuous invitation of nectar and pollen. I can spend hours right in the parking lot keying out a new Tachnid fly or beetle. The locust borer is one you may not find in August but spends more time here in September – especially fond of the goldenrods. Beautifully adorned with black cross striping against a backdrop of tawny yellow this species is most spectacular.
- 6) Look within the ditch that connects with the silver brook along the blue trail. If you're lucky you will come across what at first appears to be a relic of the Jurassic Epoch – a large dragonfly, the swamp darner, lays her eggs with the aid of a lance-like projection at the basal tip of her abdomen. She uses this device to take a slice out of soft moist wood and deposits one egg there with delicate care. When late fall and winter rains fill the ditch back up the egg will hatch and a predatory larvae will emerge to overwinter until late spring when a new generation of adult swamp darners take flight.
- 7) There is one bird that you will certainly hear bellow at this time of the year. The cat-like mews you hear along the trail are not the whisperings of sprites or elvish folk but the warning calls of the suitably named catbird telling all other forest critters to beware - a predator is about.