

Beginner's Field Guide

Fall in Chicagoland

It's fall!

Change is in the air as fall sets in. Birds are migrating south, and day by day, it gets darker earlier as we approach the winter solstice. Animals prepare for the cold, while leaves put on a colorful show. Raking leaves into garden beds or leaving some on the ground over the winter will provide birds and helpful pollinators with food and shelter until spring.

This field guide will help you get to know the plants and animals that are also spending fall in your Chicago neighborhood. These are just a few of the many birds, mammals, insects, trees, spiders and more that live in backyards, under logs, in gardens, and in nearby parks or forest preserves. Learn their common names in both English and Spanish, and their scientific names too!



Chipmunk
Ardilla rayada
Tamias striatus

These ground squirrels can sometimes be found in the city burrowing underground, using their internal cheek pouches to transport food or excavated soil.



Opossum
Tlacuache
Didelphis virginiana

Having these animals in your neighborhood can be beneficial for gardens, since they eat slugs and insects. They're not aggressive and play 'dead' when scared.



Raccoon
Mapache
Procyon lotor

Raccoons have adapted well to urban areas. Mothers and their young will scour our yards and gardens in the evening looking for food.



Blue Jay
Chara azul
Cyanocitta cristata

Some of these common, large, noisy, blue songbirds are present throughout the winter. In the fall they are likely migrating in to eat acorns.



Canada Geese
Gansos del Canadá
Branta canadensis

Winter is coming when flocks of geese 'V' their way across the sky heading south to warmer climates.



Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
Colibrí cabeza violeta
Archilochus colubris

In early fall, if you have a feeder or nectaring flowers, you may catch a glimpse of these tiny birds as they're migrating. They prefer to travel solo.



Sandhill Cranes
Grulla canadiense
Grus canadensis

Their distinctive rolling calls fill the air as these huge, elegant birds group together and migrate high overhead in large numbers. They mark fall and then the return of spring.



Centipede
Ciempiés
Lithobius forficatus

Only one pair of legs per body segment. They are fast, active hunters, even the long-legged ones we sometimes find in our homes, who are hunting pests for their food. Careful, they can pinch.



Common Eastern Bumble Bee
Abejorro
Bombus impatiens

Noisy bumble bee families nectar (feed) on asters and goldenrod, storing food so the queens can survive underground through the winter. Native bees are important pollinators but can sting.



White-Marked Tussock Moth Caterpillar

Oruga de Polilla amarilla y blanca

Orgyia leucostigma

Look but don't touch! Hairy or spiny caterpillars can cause an allergic reaction.

These familiar yet alien-like caterpillars will begin making their cocoons in the fall.



Beetle Larvae

Larva de Escarabajo

Lucanidae

Many species of beetles call Chicago home. Some, like this Stag Beetle, stay in their larval form for several years. They chew on rotting wood and help create essential soil nutrients.



Orb Weaver Spider

Araña tejedora

Araneus diadematus

Easy to find this time of year with their beautiful webs and huge from dining on flies and grasshoppers, these beauties are ready to lay their eggs.



Acorns (red oak)

Bellotas

Quercus rubra

Food for squirrels and deer and bluejays and more. Oaks produce a lot of acorns in the hopes that a few will go on to become saplings and trees.



Goldenrod

Vara de oro

Solidago spp.

Their nectar and pollen supply food for countless insects. There are many native species. Sometimes mistakenly blamed for hayfever.



Maple

Arce

Acer saccharum

The bright yellows and reds of the maple leaves are striking. When they fall to the ground, they make homes for pollinators and other insects. You can help them by waiting until the spring to rake.



Milkweed

Algodoncillo

Asclepias spp.

The dried seed pods contain beautiful seeds and soft fluff that helps the seed travel on the wind. Planting one of several native milkweed species next season will help the monarch butterfly.



White Oak

Roble

Quercus alba

The earth tones of the thick oak leaves in fall are beautiful and trees sometimes hold onto them in winter.

Go, explore!

Keep your eyes open for wildlife on your walk to school or in your parkway. See for yourself what critters are out there. Ask a trusted adult to take you to a park or nature center.

Draw your own observations of nature and what's around you! Don't forget to record Date, Location, Time, and Weather!

Authors: Laura Milkert, John Balaban and Violet Bushwall.
Artwork: Natalie Fuentes-Aleman.
Design: Alicia Diaz.

The Chicagoland area is the traditional homelands of the Three Fires Confederacy: Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi. The area was also a site of trade, gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Native tribes. We offer respect and gratitude to the diverse Indigenous people that still reside here and across the region, as well as their ancestors.