

Weather Watch

It's September! Summer is almost gone. Autumn is on its way, and winter isn't far behind. Change is in the air. The weather is cooling. Days are becoming shorter. Plants and animals are preparing for colder weather. Birds will soon fly south.

Plants and animals that stay will prepare for cold weather.

Now is the perfect time to go outside and watch creation prepare for winter. You can easily see this happen if you know what to look for. Read these pages first. Then go out-

side on a "weather watch." Look closely at the trees, the animals, the skies, and the birds. Do the same thing tomorrow. Then do it next week. You'll see them all prepare for cold weather.

Watch the Animals

Several animals put on winter coats. They shed thin summer fur and grow sleek new thicker coats. This happens to deer, wolves, and coyotes. Dogs are related to wolves and coyotes. If you have a dog, brush it often this month. That helps it shed the old fur. Then you can closely watch its winter coat grow in.

Some animals store extra food to get them through the winter. Tree squirrels and chipmunks do this. Sit quietly outside and listen to them scurry through trees and chatter at each other. They scurry to collect food, nuts, and pinecones. They chatter at each other to claim territories with lots of food.

Some squirrels pull pinecones apart to keep only the seeds. Look for messy piles of pinecone pieces beneath trees. That's a clue that a squirrel has been stashing away the seeds found in the cones.

Some chipmunks store the whole cones in the ground. They'll dig a narrow, deep, roundish hole. Then they'll pack the cones tightly into the hole just like you see pickles packed into a jar. That keeps the cones together with the "good stuff" inside. It's very difficult to find those "pickle jars." But if you watch carefully, you may see a chipmunk bury its cones.

It makes sense to store food and put on winter clothes for cold weather. But animals can't think that far ahead. They just do what comes naturally to them. They act on instinct. Who do you suppose gave them that instinct? God cares for all creatures.

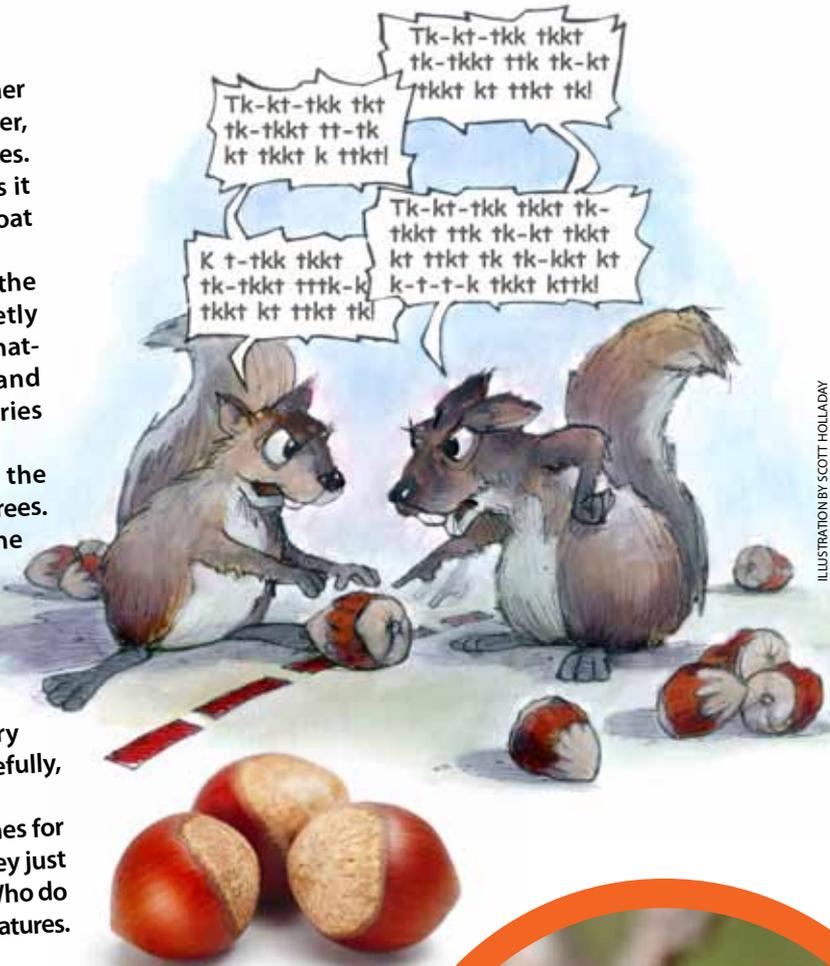


ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY



God's Promise to You

You can be absolutely sure that winter will follow fall this year. Long ago, God promised that it would. You can find that promise in Genesis 8:22.

Read God's promise to you several times, then try to write it in the blank space below.



Watch the Skies

The days are becoming shorter and nights are longer. You've probably noticed that if you play outside after supper, there's not much time before sunset. And maybe now it's still dark when you get up in the morning.

You can check your sunrise and sunset exactly by going to sunrise-sunset.org. Type in the name of your city or a city near you. You can find out exactly when the sun will set, when the moon will rise, how long today is, and how much shorter tomorrow will be.

You can also watch the sky during the day for migrating birds. Read on for more about birds.

Watch the Birds

Look up to see swarms of sparrows. Now is the time they begin to flock. All summer they've been busy with their own families. Now they're visiting their neighbors and becoming acquainted with each other. You may see them sitting close to each other on high wires or bare branches. They often migrate in swarms to avoid predators. It's true that there is safety in numbers.

Have you had hummingbirds in your yard this past summer? They certainly are getting ready to leave. Hummingbirds burn a lot of energy when they migrate. So right now they're storing food for the journey. They're eating lots of small bugs and drinking nectar or sugar water. If you see a hummingbird outside, watch closely. You may see it every day, then suddenly it will disappear. It's gone for the winter.

How about robins? In the spring we often look for the first robin to appear. Now that it's autumn, keep track of your robins. Look for the first one to disappear. They're about ready to go to warmer regions.

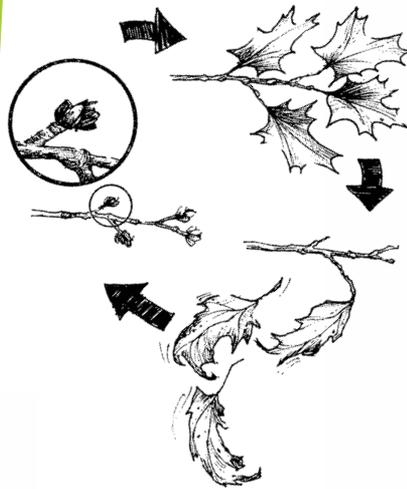
Watch the Trees

If you watch trees carefully, you'll see at least three kinds of changes.

First, leaves will change color. Watch for big flat green leaves to turn red, yellow, orange, or brown. You can also see some pine and spruce needles turn a lighter green, and then brown. Scientists tell us that these colors are in the leaves all summer. We just can't see them because the green is too strong.

Second, the leaves will drop. When they are changing color, they're also changing their "plumbing." During the summer, water is piped into the leaves from the branches. Right now trees are plugging those water pipes. Nothing will drip from or freeze in the tiny twigs left on each tree.

Third, next year's leaf buds will appear on the twigs. Look closely at the ends of the tree twigs. You should see small, well wrapped, freeze-proof buds. Next spring when the tree's water pipes are working again, the buds will swell and then open into new leaves.



Joanne De Jonge is a freelance writer and a former U.S. National Park ranger. She attends West Valley Christian Fellowship in Phoenix, Ariz.

