

EX TROPICIS



ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

Nature's Calendar

September - 91

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September is a time for new beginnings. The forests are once again green, the birdsong plenty, mammals search for mates: nature explodes with new life. September marks the end of hibernation and nature expands.

The first rains in the Central-south begin. The vegetation responds with new buds of rapid growth. The local fauna emerges from its holes into the sunshine, and the silence of the woods during the dry season is finally broken by mating calls and territorial battles: movement.

The sun crosses the equator on the 23rd. It is the Spring Equinox, when night and day are finally even, at least in length. From this day forth, the darkness comes slower and the days are longer.

It is no accident of fate that the constellations visible in the September nights of the Southern Hemisphere show us "La Fête des Animaux" (*La Fontaine's "Party of Beasts"*). A large number of constellations in the Southern Hemisphere were named in the Northern Hemisphere, and are usually associated to Greek mythology or the four seasons.

This month, the animal constellations associated to water and rebirth appear in the celestial globe. The image of Scorpio, which dominates the skies during the dry season, is linked to death and rebirth. It now sets on the west. Eagle, Dolphin, and Swan are still high on the northwestern horizon. But Aquarius, Pisces, Whale, Tucan and exuberant Pegasus rise in the east.

Behind the heat, between the wind storms, the fauna recuperates its energy, partly lost in the cold weather. The bees buzz on the yellow ipês (*Tabebuia ochracea*), which dot the forests, low vegetation areas and roadsides like huge leafless bouquets.

In the riverside forests, also without leaves, flower the mulungus (*Erythrina vellutina*) in bright red bursts, full of insects hunting for pollen. The bees circulate around the cabreúva, false canafístula, guajuvira, jambo, sibipuruna, suinã and tipuana (*endemic tropical fruits*).

Among the mammals, the mating rituals are once more excited by the guaxinins (*Procyon spp.*), skunks (*Didelphis spp.*), wild dogs (*Atelocynus microtis*), catetos (*Tayassu tajacu*), queixadas (*Tayassu pecari*), and several different primate species.

Many of them have no specific reproduction periods and nest many times a year, but in September they give in to the rhythms of nature in its best renewal efforts.

In the south, the black-necked swan (*Cygnus melancoryphus*), which hid in April, because of the changing feathers, now parades its young in the waters of the Graxaim region, in Rio Grande do Sul. The swan nests measure up to 30 centimeters and are strategically placed amidst the tall margin grasses of the lagoons and rivers. The female lays six eggs at a time, but some end up eaten by snakes, lizards, and of course, humans, who take the eggs to hatch them artificially and sell the young.

The jacus (*Penelope spp.*) also lay their eggs in September. The endangered jacus are endemic of the Southeast, and have gradually disappeared due to the intense deforestation process of the more economically "developed" states of the region.

Between the migratory species the movement is also intense. In September the birds which come from Antarctica and Patagonia and our first Northern Hemisphere Spring visitors arrive. The traffic is intense but there is food for everyone in the stopovers from the long flights.

The swallows (*Progne spp.*) and chatterers (*Reinarda squamata*) now descend towards the Central-west, coming from the northern part of the South America. From the northeastern states of Rio Grande do Norte and Ceará, leave the last "Paraguayan eared doves" (*Zenaida auriculata*) and coleiras (*Sorophila albogularis*), and the first parasitic jaegers (*Catharacta skua*) reach the caatinga (*semi-arid region of the Northeastern region*). The pilgrim hawks (*Falco peregrinus*) also arrive in Brazil at this time.

In the middle of the party, another small bird guarantees his continued existence: the shiny cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*), whose migratory route is still relatively unknown. The cowbird lays its eggs in the nests of the crown sparrows (*Zonotrichia spp.*) and rufous bellied thrushes (*Turdus rufiventris*), located in the fields of São Paulo, and in the Southern region states.

The host birds take care of the cowbird young as their own. Free from responsibility, the elder cowbirds fill their bellies at the local rice-fields. And the young cowbirds repay the hospitality by eating the lice and ticks living in their borrowed homes.

Like the trout, the saltwater snook (*Centrocomus ensiferus* and *C. undecimalis*), moves upstream during the winter to lay its eggs. The young remain in fresh waters, then move back to the ocean, where they feed on crustaceans and other fish.

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In the calm waters and tall grasses of the rivers and lagoons, the song of two types of frogs, the *Leptodactylus bocillatus* and *L. labyrinthicus*, returns with the rain. The mating calls from the males attract the females. The male frog then captures the females and pressures her abdomen with a type of thorn, which grows on its feet during this season. She then releases the eggs, and these are fertilized externally.

To complete the procedure, both male and female frog cover the eggs with a protecting foam, by beating their feet together.