

IT'S ABOUT TIME BY DAVID WAGNER

This September is the fourth one in a row where the focus must be on the dire straits of our forests. It was 2015 when I first wrote, "The worst fire season ever. Ever!" Every year since then has been just as bad or worse. Drought stress coupled with a barrage of pests and fungal diseases is killing Douglas firs rapidly. Now prominent in low elevation forests, tall, dead trees are giant torches waiting for ignition.

September is traditionally considered the best month for camping in the wild. Campfires are prohibited in all parts of the National Forests, removing one of the most enjoyable parts of camping. Use small stoves only, for cooking.

It's time to think seriously about gathering equipment for rain camping this winter. This might prove more challenging than snow camping; staying dry can be harder than staying warm. The prospect depends on the rainy season arriving soon, before the nights get too long.

We are looking forward to the annual surge of migratory bird sightings. Already our feeders are swamped with flocks of goldfinches and various sparrows. Winter waterfowl will start showing up in the ponds and sloughs where our avifauna diversity will climb. Arrival of one of my favorites, buffleheads, is keenly anticipated.

Rain or not, mushroom season is here. Chanterelles are already up near the coast; porcini in the mountains will wait for the rains. Our vegetable garden (especially the cucumbers) has benefited from hot, sunny days thanks to ample daily watering.

David Wagner is a botanist who works in Eugene. He teaches moss classes, leads nature walks and makes nature calendars. He can be contacted through his website, ferenzenmosses.com.



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