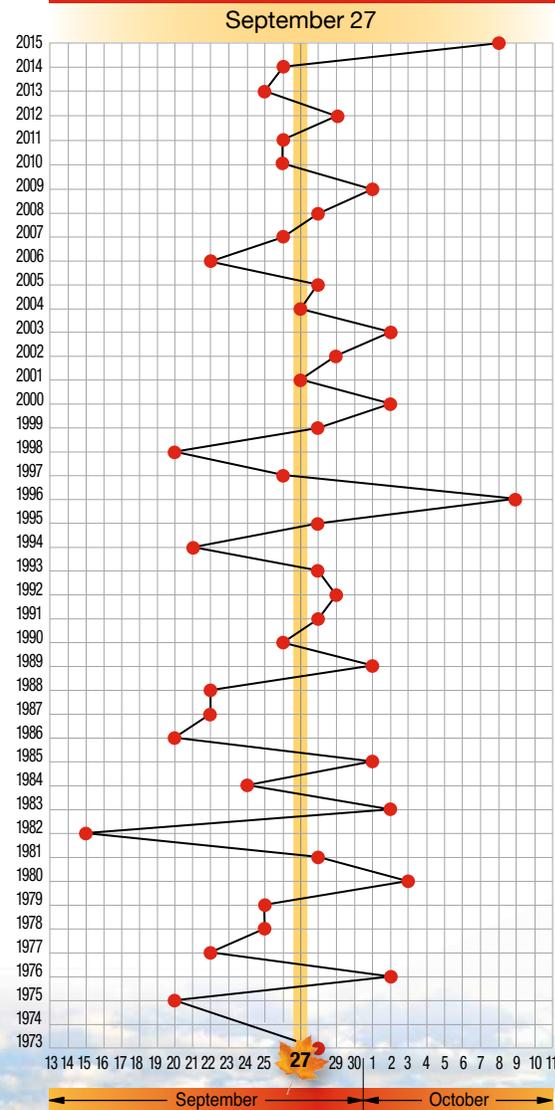


# When is Algonquin's colour at it's peak?

## AVERAGE DATE OF PEAK FALL COLOURS



Algonquin colour admirers understandably want to know when the colours will be at their peak but this is difficult to say ahead of time. We have no crystal ball; however, fall leaf colour is usually best from late September through early October. Our graph illustrates the “peak” dates since the 1970s. This may help when you plan your autumn visit to Algonquin.

You can check for regular updates on the Park's leaf-colour status by visiting: [algonquinpark.on.ca](http://algonquinpark.on.ca) or [OntarioParks.com](http://OntarioParks.com)

When in the Park, trails with good views of maple colour include:

**Track & Tower**  
(at km 25)

**Centennial Ridges**  
(2 km South from km 37.6)

**Lookout**  
(at km 39.7)

**Booth's Rock**  
(9 km South from km 40.3)

*Enjoy the view!*



## ALGONQUIN PARK IS BLACK BEAR COUNTRY

For most Park visitors, seeing a Black Bear in its natural environment is an exciting experience. However, the excitement diminishes when that Black Bear is rummaging through your cooler or tent, searching for food. As visitors camping in bear country, you have a responsibility to follow the bear rules and to know what to do if you encounter a bear.



### Rules in Bear Country

Each year, Park staff spend hundreds of hours dealing with problem bears – help our staff by following the rules when camping in bear country.

#### 1 Never feed or approach bears

The Black Bear is an intelligent animal, with the ability to remember food locations and can quickly become accustomed to human sources of food. People who feed bears create problems for everyone.

#### 2 Store food out of reach of bears

In campgrounds and picnic areas, store all food (including pet food) inside the closed trunk of your vehicle, if possible. Do not store food, cooking utensils or fragrant items, such as soap, toothpaste, or shaving cream in your tent.

When camping in the backcountry, put all food in a pack and hang it well off the ground – at least four metres off the ground and two metres away from the tree trunk – and away from the vicinity of your tent.

#### 3 Keep your campsite clean

In campgrounds, reduce the availability of garbage, and consequently garbage odours, by depositing your sealed bags of garbage daily in the bear-proof waste containers. Clean your picnic table and barbecue after every use, and clean up any spilled grease.

When camping in the backcountry, burn any food scraps and fat drippings thoroughly in a hot fire. Any remaining garbage should be placed in your litter bag and suspended along with the food. To eliminate food odours, dishes should be washed immediately after each meal (preferably well away from your campsite).

**Charges can be laid for leaving out items which may serve as attractants to any wildlife.**



The Visitor Centre offers **FREE WiFi** internet access ...and while there, don't forget to check out The Friends of Algonquin Park Bookstore and Nature Shop, or the Sunday Creek Café.

[algonquinpark.on.ca](http://algonquinpark.on.ca)



Algonquin

# The Raven

A Natural and Cultural History Digest

Vol. 57, No. 3 • September 1, 2016

## The Bank is Empty

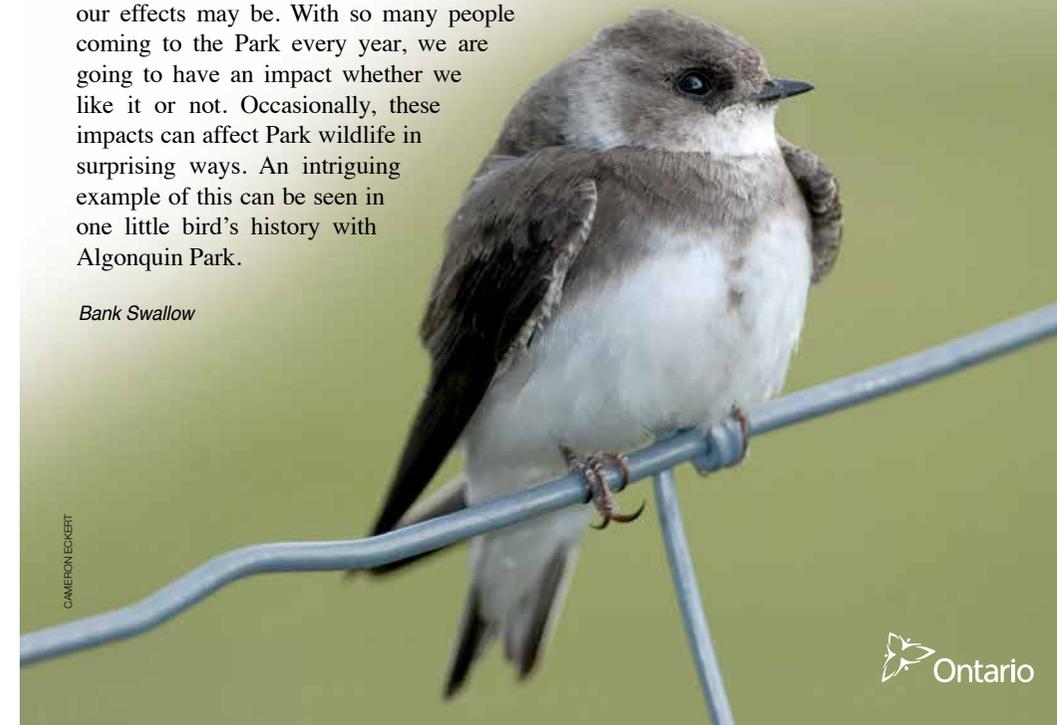
by Sonje Bols

At this point, we are well into the busy fall visitation season. Campgrounds along Highway 60 are often full and you're very likely to encounter others while out enjoying the forests, bogs, beaver ponds, lakes and everything else this beautiful Park has to offer. In fact, nearly one million people visit Algonquin Park each year!

With the Park a-flurry with human activity right now, it's an ideal moment to ponder how we fit into the Algonquin landscape and what our effects may be. With so many people coming to the Park every year, we are going to have an impact whether we like it or not. Occasionally, these impacts can affect Park wildlife in surprising ways. An intriguing example of this can be seen in one little bird's history with Algonquin Park.

I'm talking about the Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*). This is the smallest of the North American Swallows, weighing in at just 14 grams (compare that to the familiar American Robin which weighs 77 grams!). They can be distinguished from other swallow species not just by their small size, but by their striking appearance: grey-brown backs and a stark white belly with a contrasting dark brown breast band.

Bank Swallow





An active Bank Swallow colony in a river bank.

SONUEBOLS

Bank Swallows are unique among swallows in that they nest colonially in burrows dug into sandy, near-vertical banks like those found along rivers and lakes and in gravel pits. Incredibly, they dig these nest burrows themselves (which are usually between 60 and 90 cm deep) using just their beaks, wings and feet! At the back of these burrows, Bank Swallows will usually lay four or five eggs in a simple nest consisting of grasses and feathers. They are highly social birds and their colonies can number anywhere from 2 to 2000 active nests, depending on the nest bank.

While they are quite selective in their nesting requirements, Bank Swallows are common where suitable nesting habitat exists. In places south of the Park like the shores of Lake Erie and along the Saugeen River in southern Ontario, they are abundant. They are also among the most widely-distributed birds in the world, being found on every continent except Australia and Antarctica. Our North American populations breed from the Central United States north to the Arctic Circle, wintering in Central and South America.

Bank Swallows are rarely seen in Algonquin Park now. Being dominated by the shallow soils and rocky outcroppings of the Canadian Shield, the Park does not have many suitable natural nesting banks for the Bank Swallow. Nevertheless, Bank Swallows have lived and bred here in the past. In 1900, a prominent ornithologist visiting the area described them as “not common” and saw just a few nesting in a bank at Whitefish Lake. Since then, further

observations tell us that the Bank Swallow was a widespread but uncommon breeder in Algonquin Park until the late 1980s. However, it is now a very rare and irregular visitor that does not breed or even get observed here every year. What happened to the Bank Swallow?

As part of a government make-work project during the Great Depression of the 1930s, Highway 60 was built through the Park. It wasn’t much more than a dirt road at first, but it has been paved and widened over the years to create the highway we know and use today. One of these widenings happened in the 1960s to accommodate more tourist and through traffic. With this reconstruction came the opening of gravel pits adjacent to the highway in places like Rock Lake Road, the Mew Lake Campground entrance, the East Gate and Opeongo Road. At the same time, Park staff noticed that Bank Swallows and their nest colonies were being found much more frequently. Where, you may ask? Interestingly, in the gravel pits opened for the highway expansion!

Bank Swallows will commonly nest in gravel and sand pits, especially in areas where natural nesting banks are scarce. Because the Park’s gravel pits were being regularly excavated, they maintained the near-vertical bank face required by the swallows. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Bank Swallows nested consistently in these pits, taking advantage of this man-made habitat in a landscape where natural nesting habitat was highly uncommon.

The numbers of active nests in these gravel

pits varied widely between years and between pits, but were generally quite small. Some hosted up to 80 nests, while others only 4 or 5. A colony at a gravel pit near km 28, for example, had 64 nests one year, 32 the next and just 4 the following year.



Sims Pit on Arowhon Road, circa 1930. A sand pit opened for railway construction in the 1890s, Bank Swallows nested here during the 1960s and 1970s.

During the 1980s, however, Bank Swallows became less and less common in Algonquin. At this point it was becoming increasingly obvious that something was happening to this species all over Ontario. Their populations were shifting southward off the Canadian Shield and their numbers were plummeting. Between 1970 and 2004, the Algonquin Park

area saw its Bank Swallow population decline by over 10% per year. By 2012, their Ontario population was 2% of what it was in 1970.

By 1995, most of Algonquin’s gravel pits had slumped because of disuse or were rehabilitated, making them unsuitable as nest sites. Even though some nesting banks did remain, with the widespread decline of Bank Swallows across the province, there weren’t many birds around to use them—especially in the marginal habitat Algonquin offered. Bank Swallows have not been seen breeding in the Park since 1989.

This decline is not limited to Ontario. As part of a puzzling pattern, Bank Swallows, along with other swallows, swifts, nighthawks, whip-poor-wills and some flycatchers (all birds that feed on flying insects) are seeing their numbers drop significantly all over northeastern North America—more severely than any other group of birds. Reasons for this decline are largely unknown, but currently receiving considerable study. They may include anything from changes in the numbers and occurrences of insects to habitat loss and pesticide use in South American wintering areas.

In this case, a highway expansion—intended

## Demise of a Swallow

Barn Swallows nested commonly on buildings, bridges and culverts in Algonquin Park until about 1995. At least 115 pairs nested in the Highway 60 Corridor, but currently there are fewer than 15 pairs breeding there. Barn Swallow numbers have declined dramatically here and throughout northeastern North America, along with other swallows, swifts, nighthawks, whip-poor-wills and some flycatchers. All these birds forage for insects in the air. Reasons for the decline of the Barn Swallow are currently under study but may include:



changes in the timing of occurrence and the numbers of insects; more severe weather events due to climate warming that reduce the availability of insect prey during the critical nestling period; and habitat loss and pesticide use in the South American wintering areas.

Please report the date and location of your Algonquin Park Barn Swallow sightings at the Visitor Centre or by email to: [wildlifesurveys@algonquinpark.on.ca](mailto:wildlifesurveys@algonquinpark.on.ca)

to make travel through the Park safer and easier for Park visitors—incidentally led to the creation of nesting habitat for a species that was previously much less numerous in Algonquin. As a result, the population of these birds in the Park increased substantially (however briefly) and was maintained until

their widespread decline. We are not always able to anticipate how our actions will influence the Park. Sometimes, however, our activities have unintentional, unpredictable, and even fascinating results that give us insight into the lifestyle of a threatened little bird in a rugged landscape!

## Algonquin Park 2015 Loon Survey



Please give us a hand by reporting your loon sightings this year.

Report forms are available at park offices and the Visitor Centre or email to:

[wildlifesurveys@algonquinpark.on.ca](mailto:wildlifesurveys@algonquinpark.on.ca)

PETER FERGUSON

### Loon Reproduction in Algonquin

Year	# of lakes surveyed	% with nest/young
1981	121	38
1982	184	28
1983	237	21
1984	298	34
1985	210	37
1986	216	35
1987	261	43
1988	260	40
1989	240	41
1990	248	40
1991	201	50
1992	203	39
1993	232	43
1994	183	46
1995	223	45
1996	219	42
1997	173	45
1998	175	42
1999	190	33
2000	216	44
2001	168	39
2002	143	41
2003	120	46
2004	144	41
2005	156	40
2006	147	41
2007	138	43
2008	169	39
2009	146	40
2010	138	36
2011	134	51
2012	128	48
2013	120	52
2014	152	41
2015	129	40

The haunting calls of the Common Loon symbolize Algonquin’s wild country for many people. Nearly every small lake has a breeding pair and there are multiple pairs on the larger lakes. Unfortunately, there are environmental threats to loons throughout their range that could potentially affect numbers here in the Park. These include reduced reproductive success caused by acid precipitation, and loons dying during migration due to avian botulism.

In 1981, we began a project to help determine just how well loons were doing in Algonquin. Visitors and staff report the lakes where they see adult loons, their nests and young. On average, nests or young were observed on 40% of lakes where loons were reported during the 35 years from 1981 to 2015. Only a long-term monitoring program can distinguish real trends from normal yearly fluctuations and we need observations from as many lakes as possible.