“We are stardust, we are golden
We are billion-year-old carbon
And we got to get ourselves back to the garden”
- Joni Mitchell (sung most memorably by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young)

This week we net a season low count of only 9 birds, down from 22 the previous week. Dr. Van Roo observes that this is consistent with other years and sites, and I wonder what influences this change in numbers. Looking at the previous weeks’ data, seasonal influences on bird behavior come clear. In early June, increasing hours of daylight and rising temperatures change nest material options. Winter detritus like twigs, needles, spent grasses and cattail fluff (plus shedding pony fur) are amended with new material. Emergent spring growth begins to provide the right vitamins, minerals and calorie levels for mating and egg laying.

By mid June, nesting is well under way. New leaves provide weather protection and cover for vulnerable brooding parents. And timed perfectly with hatching, is an explosion of insects. By early July, a frenzy of bug gathering and beak stuffing is underway. Makes being a mammal look easy!

Double-check that, when it comes to nursery school. Mid July: the farm looks like avian Little League with many helicopter parents and few umpires. Fledglings learn to forage for themselves, hide in the shrubbery, distinguish guidance chirps from alarm calls. By instinct and vision (those carotenoids again!), they learn how to camouflage themselves by shape and color. Many mornings, the young Orchard Orioles “hide” in matching Daylilies. This week, food is so abundant that bird parents have shepherded their young far and wide; gone to an “away game”. As there is no longer the necessity to make a beeline back to a specific nest, the chance of hitting a mist net is much reduced.

So closely allied are the seasonal opportunities for both plants and animals, that they aid and abet each other on their way to fruition. Post Midsummer, maturing plants now segue to high calorie fruit and seeds, so necessary during fall migration, and generously set aside winter stores for those birds who stay behind.

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven”
- Pete Seeger (from Ecclesiastes); sung most memorably by The Byrds