

Keep an eye on the pigeons --- they know

It seems every day we talk about the weather. You know, "Boy, is it ever hot today," or "That humidity out there is something else." And everybody complains about the cold of winter.

Ever notice how many people have sayings for nearly every aspect of it?

Having lived on a farm all my life, I've come to realize farmers rely on old sayings about crops and weather more than any other group in society.

As a kid, I was raised on the saying, "Red sky at night; sailor's delight. Red sky in morning; sailor take warning."

At home, we lived by that one all summer long, when it came time to cut hay. If the sun went down a crimson ball of fire at night, we were sure of a fair day to follow. On the other hand, crawling out of bed at the crack of dawn to a red sky spelled certain showers before that day was done.

Another one came from an old neighbor of mine, Jack Lawson. I'm sure it was passed down from his dad, Angus.

During spring planting, Jack would always say, "Sow in the dust and the grainary will bust."

Well Jack is no longer with us, but I always think of his saying in the spring as I watch local farmers planting their crops.

And it's true.

A crop planted in the wet ground never grows well because the sun tends to bake the ground. On the other hand, one sown in dry, dusty soil, seems to grow and thrive as the summer progresses.

The spring was always the time for my grandfather to recite the old rhyme about spring planting.

"Caw, caw," says the crow, "Spring is coming, this I know.

See that farmer planting corn? I shall breakfast there some morn."

Or later in the summer he would update it with, "See that farmer planting wheat? That shall be my breakfast treat!"

Other sayings and simple observations have been used over the years to forecast the weather, and fairly accurately at that.

Take pigeons, for example.

Yep, you read it right; ordinary barn pigeons.

A TED BIT

By TED BROWN



We could always tell if it was going to rain by where they roosted on the barn roof.

Okay, I heard those snickers out there.

But I'm serious. I think it was great aunt Agnes who told me that one.

If pigeons sit in a row on the peak of the barn roof, it will rain within 12 hours. During fair weather, they sit, scattered all over the roof, halfway down, nowhere near the peak.

Honest.

Don't ask me why, but it works. All the time.

I guess you just can't fool a pigeon. It could be a sunny, clear day, but if the pigeons start lining up on the peak, you guessed it, rain will fall.

Trust me.

It's the same with barn swallows.

One can forecast an impending storm by the height they swooped above the ground. If they swoop low, about a foot or two up, it will rain that day, probably within hours. During clear, dry weather, swallows swoop around 15 to 20 feet up in the air.

No, I haven't lost my mind. You can actually tell by watching them.

Even read a scientific explanation of the phenomenon. (So obviously, someone else has noticed it as well.)

Apparently, the height insects fly is governed by the pressure in the atmosphere. During foul weather, or just prior to a storm, (in a low pressure area,) insects are flying low, close to the ground.

But in fair weather, these little critters turn into "high-flyers" of sorts, and put some space between them and the ground.

Apparently the atmospheric pressure changes before humans can detect it, but the bugs seem to know, so they react, flying higher or lower, depending on the pressure.

And, of course so do the swallows, as they feed exclusively on flying insects.

Simple eh?

And you thought it was something magic.

Years ago, I don't think our forefathers worried too much about the explanation. They only knew it worked.

Other signs like a ring around a full moon signals a winter storm, or the obvious one of leaves on trees turning inside out before rain are fairly familiar to most everyone.

More obvious still, I suppose if one sees a funnel cloud forming, it's a pretty safe bet to say a tornado is on the way.

I found it interesting to learn Indians had sayings years ago to forecast the weather as well.

Apparently one was about

dew on the grass.

"If the morning ground is dry, the skies will weep before nightfall. But if the ground is wet at first light (the dew is heavy,) the sun will shine brightly all day."

Yep, even our earliest Canadians had their sayings about the weather.

Years ago, my grandfather always talked about the summer skies at night as the sun went down.

Without fail, he would stand with his hands in his pockets and gaze up to the heavens saying, "Hmmm, it's a mackerel sky; not long wet, not long dry."

He was referring to the layers of salmon-colored sky, which was often followed with uncertain weather; wet one day and dry and sunny the next.

The progress of crops has often been measured with sayings.

A good stand of corn had to be "knee-high, on the first of July" and May 24 was always figured to be the date to start haying.

Today, we watch weather forecasts on television, complete with high tech computerized graphics of satellite images showing incoming storms and projected "five-day forecasts."

It looks impressive and weather people boast about their accuracy. Let's face it, they influence thousands of people daily, whether to take their umbrellas or sun hats to work the next day, depending on the forecast.

But for me, it's way too complicated. I'm sticking to the simple approach.

I'll just watch where the pigeons land on the barn roof.

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