

# Weather Wisdom

by Ernest Thompson Seton

When the dew is on the grass,  
Rain will never come to pass.

When the grass is dry at night,  
Look for rain before the light.

When grass is dry at morning light,  
Look for rain before the night.

Three days' rain will empty any sky.

A deep, clear sky of fleckless blue  
Breeds storms within a day or two.

When the wind is in the east,  
It's good for neither man nor beast.  
When the wind is in the north,  
The old folk should not venture forth.  
When the wind is in the south,  
It blows the bait in the fishes' mouth.  
When the wind is in the west,  
It is of all the winds the best.

An opening and a shetting  
Is a sure sign of a wetting.

(Another version)

Open and shet,  
Sure sign of wet.

(Still another)

It's lighting up to see to rain.

Evening red and morning gray  
Sends the traveler on his way.  
Evening gray and morning red  
Sends the traveler home to bed.

Red sky at morning, the shepherd takes warning;  
Red sky at night is the shepherd's delight.

If the sun goes down cloudy Friday, sure of a clear  
Sunday.

If a rooster crows standing on a fence or high place,  
it will clear. If on the ground, it doesn't count.

Between eleven and two  
You can tell what the weather is going to do.

Rain before seven, clear before eleven.

Fog in the morning, bright sunny day.  
If it rains, and the sun is shining at the same time, the  
devil is whipping his wife and it will surely rain  
tomorrow.  
If it clears off during the night, it will rain again  
shortly.  
Sun drawing water, sure sign of rain.

A circle round the moon means "storm." As many  
stars as are in circle, so many days before it will rain.

Sudden heat brings thunder.

A storm that comes against the wind is always a  
thunderstorm.

The oak and the ash draw lightning. Under the birch,  
the cedar, and balsam you are safe. (Don't believe it)

East wind brings rain.

West wind brings clear, bright, cool weather.

North wind brings cold.

South wind brings heat. (On Atlantic coast.)

The rain-crow or cuckoo (both species) is supposed  
by all hunters to foretell rain when its "Kow, kow,  
kow" is long and hard.

So, also, the tree-frog cries before rain.

Swallows flying low is a sign of rain; high, of clearing  
weather.

The rain follows the wind, and the heavy blast is just  
before the shower.

*The Birch Bark Roll*

# **PREDICTING WEATHER THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY**

Will it be sunny for your family barbeque? Should a Scout softball game or soccer match be postponed because of the threat of rain?

A hundred years ago, the first edition of the *Boy Scout Handbook* offered weather prediction guidelines such as these:

*When the grass is dry at night  
Look for rain before the light.*

*When the grass is dry at morning light  
Look for rain before the night.*

These rhymes held some truth--moisture wrung out of the air as dew can't fall as rain--but today's Scouts rely on news reports and the Internet for accurate predictions of conditions for the days ahead.

Of course, that's not possible when backcountry adventures take you far from computers, televisions, and radios. Then what you see in the sky can help you decide whether to keep going with your activities or dive into your tent just ahead of a rainstorm.

The shapes of clouds are good indicators of weather to come. For example, thin and wispy *cirrus clouds* indicate stable weather. So do *cumulus clouds* that look like big fluffy cotton balls. Keep an eye on them, though. Afternoon heat can swell them into *cumulonimbus* thunderheads bearing lightning, hail, and heavy rain.

Check out the BSA *Fieldbook* for a modern-day discussion of clouds and many ways to predict the weather. Cub Scouts earning the Weather Belt Loop and Pin can also learn basic weather-watching skills.

The current edition of the *Boy Scout Handbook* explains some of the old weather signs this way:

## ***Signs of Fair Weather***

Expect pleasant weather when you see some of these signs:

- "Red sky at night, sailor's delight." The dust particles in the dry air of tomorrow's weather produce a glowing red sunset.
- "Swallows flying way up high mean there's no rain in the sky." Swallows are birds that catch and eat flying insects. In the high air pressure that comes with fair weather, insects may be carried aloft by air currents.
- "If smoke goes high, no rain comes by." Campfire smoke rises straight up when there is no wind. Still air is generally stable and won't move moisture into an area.

## ***Signs of Stormy Weather***

The following signs suggest bad weather is on the way:

- "Red sky at morning, sailor take warning." Dry, dusty air is moving away from you toward the east. Clouds and moist air may be coming in from the west.
- "Swallows flying near the ground mean a storm will come around." The low air pressure that pulls in stormy weather causes insects to fly close to the ground on heavy, moist wings. Swallows feeding on them will follow.
- "If smoke hangs low, watch out for a blow." Low air pressure can prevent campfire smoke from rising very high.

Whether it's a sporting event, a picnic, or a hike, take along an extra layer of clothing in case the weather doesn't turn out as predicted.

For more information on predicting weather, consult Chapter 25, "Weather," of the *BSA Fieldbook, Fifth Edition*.