



Naturalist Notes



September outreach events included Bat Fest at the Houston Arboretum (left and middle) and Squawk Walk at Exploration Green (right).

LEAVE THE LEAVES

Many invertebrates depend on leaf litter to survive the winter, even in our milder climate. Leaving the leaves ensures biodiversity and increased bird food in the Spring. For more info, check the Xerces Society's blog at www.xerxes.org/blog

CHAPTER MEETINGS WILL BE EITHER IN-PERSON OR ONLINE

Look for a message from our president with information on the format of the monthly meeting.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON - DOWNTOWN STUDENT LIFE ARTICLE ON MONARCHS

Indira Zaldivar reached out to me in my role as Co-Director of the Texas Butterfly Monitoring Network for an article on Monarch migration and how students can help. See her article at <https://www.uhd.edu/student-life/datetime/articles-2022/Pages/issue69-1-1.aspx>



Sunset

The magic of the Earth is on display
As we reach the end of another day,
I watch and feel the calm come on,
With the sky and trees, I'm not alone.

It's the time of day when the trees speak,
Listen and hear their opaque critique,
Watch as the rays of the sun diffuse,
Imagine playtime in the home of Zeus.

The three trees stand bathed in orange light,
Riveted on the spectacle, feeling delight,
Tickling each other's sensitive roots,
The trees are giggling, no disputes.

The three trees are talking back and forth,
Trading ideas about the way of the Earth,
Watching the sun as it moves along,
Helping the wind compose its song.

The end of day is a peaceful time,
A time for reflection, a time for rhyme,
Night herons leaving for their daily feed,
White egrets roosting after meeting their need.

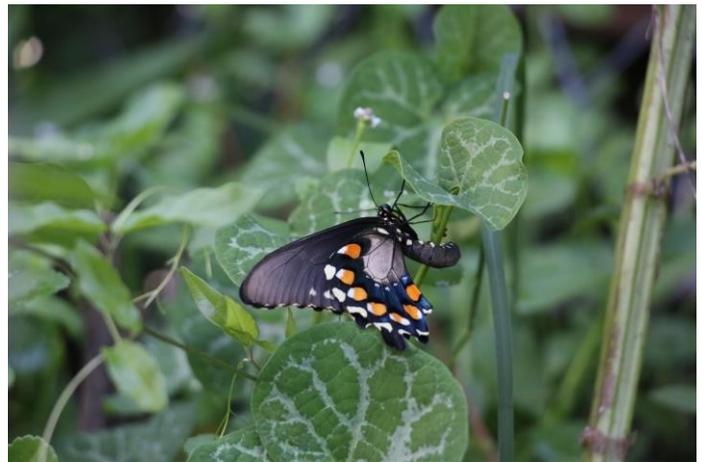
I think on these trees as the bird's home,
And as a place where the squirrels roam,
A place of respite, a place that is safe,
A place of hiding from the raptor's strafe.

When the sun slips behind the Earth's back,
And night creeps in painting orange sky black,
I cover my mouth with a lazy yawn,
And say goodbye for the day is gone.

In the Church of the Earth, we relish sky color,
And the conversations trees have with each other,
We enjoy observing and intuiting more,
We enjoy walking where none have before.

So welcome to Earth church,
Grab yourself an orange pew,
Here the sky and the trees
Share knowledge with you.

Jim Blackburn, Illustration by Isabelle Scurry
Chapman



"In nature, nothing exists alone."

- Rachel Carson

Photo by Andrea Matthews, quote suggested by Jane
Wood



Re-Story-ation - The Land Cannot Heal Until We Tell Its Stories

According to Robin Kimmerer (“Braiding Sweetgrass”), it is not only the land that is broken, but also our relationship to the land. Land restoration requires not only ecological restoration, but also cultural reconnection.

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) live southeast of the Great Lakes. At the start of school and before gatherings, a Thanksgiving Address is said. It lays out the relationship of the people to the natural world and to each other.

As part of a class taught by Rebecca Rolnick, each of us wrote a Thanksgiving Address for our specific sit spot as well as a story about something we’ve experienced in our sit spot. My sit spot is the Cypress Pond at the Bellaire Nature Discovery Center.

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“As I come here, I give thanks for the people, those who have built this place and those who maintain it. I give thanks for those who appreciate this spot.”

This morning I have only a few minutes to spend at my sit spot, so I hurriedly grab my journaling supplies from the front seat and walk the short distance along the path. Kids are playing in the sand box, while parents sit and chat at the picnic tables.

A few steps further, and I am on the path to the pond. It is warm and still. Dwarf palmetto fronds reach up from the buried trunk next to the path. Along the pond edge, the light green fronds of the papyrus stand out against the darker green leaves of the lizard tail. Several small trees shade the wooden deck.

Today I am not alone here. A small boy and his mother are standing at the edge of the deck, looking intently into the pond. The boy points out the turtles, excitedly looking for the smallest one swimming through the lizard tail stalks. He is throwing bread into the pond. Nature cop or nature guide, what role do I choose today?

Walking over to them, I decide not to make a big deal about throwing food in the water. The boy tells me about the turtles, and how there are so many in the pond today. We talk about the fish, and I suggest gently that the animals probably have enough food already. Mom and son agree and head off to the nature center for his class. I spend a few more minutes making notes and sketching a spider before heading back to the car and my next appointment.

Later, as I think about my short visit to the Cypress Pond, I realize that I saw more than juvenile turtles. I joined a small boy and his mother in building a relationship with this place. I did not have a small boy throwing bread into the pond in mind when I wrote the Thanksgiving address. But his delight in the small turtles is a perfect example of appreciation.”

Woodlice (Pill Bugs) May Be Useful for Bioremediation

Terrestrial isopods are common throughout the world. In temperate regions, most live in the soil and are critical for nutrient cycling. Many industrial sites are contaminated with heavy metals, for example copper, lead, and cadmium. Pill bugs take up heavy metals and sequester them in their bodies. Pill bugs are easy to collect and study because they are relatively large. Therefore, they can serve as both indicators of contamination as well as in remediation.

Pill bugs serve as food for a variety of invertebrates and vertebrates. Toxic metal accumulation in the food chain presents a concern.

Paoletti & Hassal (1999) *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment* 74:157-165

Birds Respond Innately to Unfamiliar Alarm Calls

Scientists used the call and song of Black-capped Chickadees to determine whether birds respond innately or by learning. In North America, many songbirds respond by coming closer, make alarm calls or begin actively foraging when they hear the chickadee's call. Birds in Costa Rica, Colombia, and Brazil are not familiar with chickadees. Scientists played the call both when migrants were present and when they were absent. Under both conditions, resident birds responded more strongly to the call than the song and approached the speaker. The conclusion is that recognition of the alarm call is innate.

Sandoval, L., and D. R. Wilson (2022). Neotropical birds respond innately to unfamiliar acoustic signals. *The American Naturalist* 200:1-16.

"Vigil" Exhibit at Michelson Museum of Art



The Michelson Museum of Art in Marshall, TX is currently exhibiting a series of Isabelle Scurry Chapman's artwork along with Jim Blackburn's poems. The exhibit opening was held on Sep 15th.

The exhibit is based on the *Virus Vigil*, a year of artwork and poems created during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. If you happen to be in Marshall, be sure to stop by.

ORGANISM OF THE MONTH

BOLETE (BOLETUS RUBROFLAMMEUS)

After several days of rain, mushrooms pop up seemingly everywhere! One of the mushrooms around our live oak is a mushroom with a reddish cap and pores under the cap. Determining the species relies on sensory clues as well as location.

The cap was reddish with yellow undertones, while the underside was yellowish. The stem was a rich magenta fading into pale yellow near the ground.

One way to identify mushrooms is through the color of the spore print. This mushroom has a brown spore print, with the pores clearly visible.

Cutting and looking for a color change is another way to identify mushrooms. The flesh of this mushroom changed from creamy yellow to blue within seconds, then faded to a light grey.

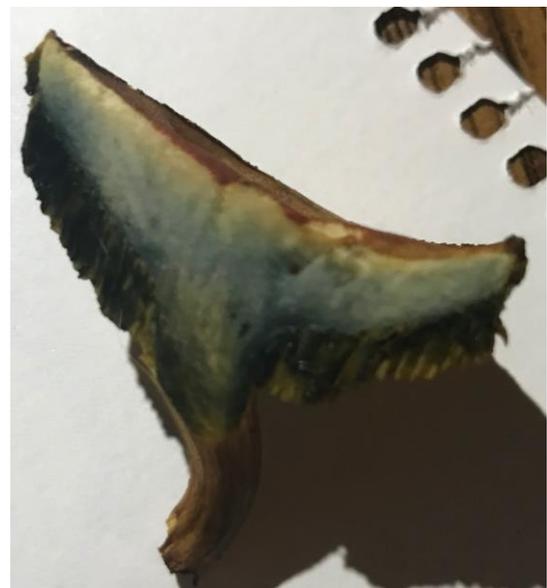
According to the reference, *B. rubroflammeus* has no distinct odor or taste. The mushroom I found did not smell of anything. I did not taste it.

Different mushroom species are found under different trees. The flame bolete is associated with conifers, while *B. rubroflammeus* is associated with hardwood including oaks.

Based on all the above characteristics, this was most likely *B. rubroflammeus* .

Sources:

https://www.mushroomexpert.com/boletus_rubroflammeus.html





There's Still Time for Houston Bird Week

Houston Audubon is hosting a variety of events with partner organizations all around town through Sep 24th. For a full calendar of events, check

<https://houstonaudubon.org/programs/birdweek/birdweek.html>