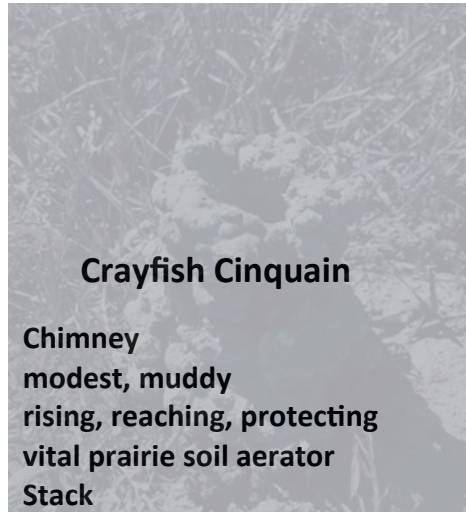




Naturalist Notes

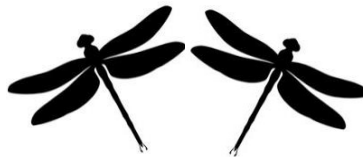


Crayfish Cinquain

Chimney
modest, muddy
rising, reaching, protecting
vital prairie soil aerator
Stack

Walking the prairie boardwalk at Sheldon Lake SP on a sunny afternoon, I felt drawn to the muddy crayfish chimneys sticking up from the ground. Looking for a short poem format, I came upon the cinquain. There are at least two different ways to approach the format, counting syllables or using a particular number of words in each line. This version is based on word count.

Irmi Willcockson



City Nature Challenge

Observations:
Apr 30th – May 4th

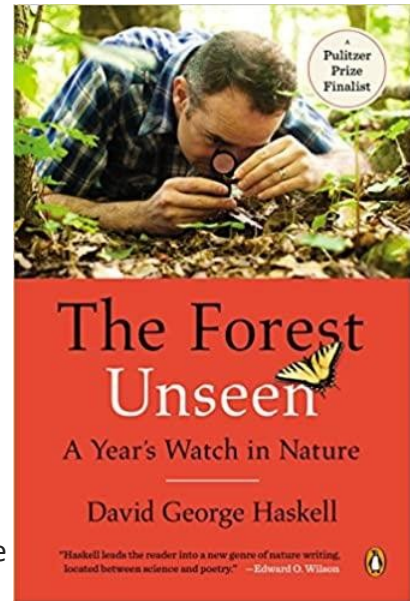
Identify:
May 4th – 9th

Book Review

The Forest Unseen- A Year's Watch in Nature 2012, David George Haskell, Penguin Books

"In *The Forest Unseen*, biologist David George Haskell surveys a tiny kingdom, a mere square meter of land in Tennessee's Cumberland National Forest. Yet, as he demonstrates in lyrical and intricate detail, within the borders of this miniature landscape, we can find the unfolding story of life on Earth. Haskell tends his kingdom through the shifting seasons of a year, focusing not on the showy megafauna but on the small and fundamental forest dwellers, from glimmering lichen to slow-moving slugs. He writes with a scientist's meticulous attention to detail and a poet's way with words. As he spins his tales of the tiny and the ordinary, we see the big picture issues, from evolution to climate change, unfold in the everyday world."

2013 PEN/E. O. WILSON LITERARY SCIENCE WRITING AWARD
RUNNER-UP David George Haskell, *The Forest Unseen* (Viking)
FROM THE JUDGES' CITATION



This [2013 Pulitzer Prize finalist](#) speaks to every naturalist, regardless of area of interest or specialization. It is an outstanding combination of persistent, careful observation, wide ranging thinking about the interconnections of nature and a language sensibility that eloquently communicates to the reader the microscopic, the small and the vast and their interconnectedness.

Here is from [Goodreads](#) a succinct description of how Haskell does this:

"Each of this book's short chapters begins with a simple observation: a salamander scuttling across the leaf litter; the first blossom of spring wildflowers. From these, Haskell spins a brilliant web of biology and ecology, explaining the science that binds together the tiniest microbes and the largest mammals and describing the ecosystems that have cycled for thousands—sometimes millions—of years. Each visit to the forest presents a nature story in miniature as Haskell elegantly teases out the intricate relationships that order the creatures and plants that call it home."

You can get at least three things from reading this book. You will learn a lot in ways you won't forget because you will remember the connections and not just or necessarily the details. You will have an increased appreciation of how things are truly interconnected. And you will experience science writing that is not only accurate but beautiful.

Bob Romero



 **Organism of the Month**
Texas Leafcutter Ant (*Atta texana*)

Leafcutter ants have several common names, such as town ant, parasol ant, and night ant. Mature colonies may contain up to 2 million individuals, and up to 50 to 80 feet across. On flat ground, mounds are composed of sand or silt and raised. The picture above was taken on a trail, where the above ground evidence of the colony included numerous dropped leaf cuttings in a circle with a hole in the center.

Morphology of individuals is quite variable. Most ants in the colony are sterile females. Queens lay eggs continually; fertile females and males emerge on dark nights in the Spring.

Leafcutter ants don't eat the leaves themselves. Instead, they use leaves to grow the fungus on which they feed. Because colonies can be large, leafcutter ants are considered pests in gardens and agricultural settings. At high densities, they can even prevent natural propagation of pine seedlings. Control of leafcutter ants is difficult and depends on the setting.

Source: <https://citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/landscape/ants/ent-1002/>



Different Perspectives – Chinese Tallow and Honeybees

I recently received an email from the Texas Beekeepers Association (TBA), urging their members to comment on the planned actions of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to introduce two non-native insects (a small moth (*Gadirtha fusca*), and a small beetle (*Bikasha collaris*) from China) with the aim to biologically control the invasive Chinese Tallow tree (*Triadica sebifera*).

As a hobby honey beekeeper, I have previously been exposed to the fact that commercial Texas beekeepers favor the Chinese Tallow tree as a “crop”, describing it as “the most bee friendly tree in the USA”, as it provides an abundance of pollen and nectar for Spring hive population build up. In fact, they maintain that Tallow is an “irreplaceable forage” and “supports 90+% of the honey produced in Texas.”

As a Texas Master Naturalist, I recognize the destruction of local native landscapes, particularly the coastal prairie, by this invasive tree species.

The APHIS environmental assessment made available for comment re the proposed release of *Bikasha collaris* and *Gadirtha fusca* is an interesting read. It does mention the potential impact of Tallow tree removal to the beekeeping industry, but since the biological removal is expected to occur over five or more years, and not to be complete eradication, their suggestion is to replace the Tallow with native plants that would supply alternative forage. The report indicates that established trees would not be affected, but new tree growth would be eaten by the introduced insects.

While research has been undertaken in China, and in quarantine in Florida, it is noted that the North American ecotype tallow plants differ from the native Chinese ecotypes, introducing uncertainty into the larval feeding results. The report acknowledges that once these biological controls are introduced there will be little opportunity to rein them in. The risk of them jumping hosts is also investigated with lists of plants that are known to be eaten by these two insects in other areas of their native range and lists of related North American plant species (native and introduced), some of which are currently endangered, which may be at risk if this occurs.

This is clearly a complicated web, starting with a federally introduced tree species that was hoped to be an agricultural asset, that ended up being highly invasive and destructive to the native habitats, but now being so common in Texas that it is seen by some as an irreplaceable asset supporting their agricultural business, built itself on a non-native insect.

I write not to comment on the various actions of these organizations, but as food for thought and to highlight the need to continue to educate everyone on all sides of these conversations.

Julie d’Ablaing.

Water of the Month - Eddies

Eddies are created when water flows past an obstruction, large or small. They are circular, which means that water will flow backwards in some part of the eddy. The backward flow is always thinner than the main flow, and never exceeds the main river's speed.

Confusingly, both the turbulent water around the obstruction and the backflow are called eddies.

In the picture below, you can see the main flow of Buffalo Bayou, and an eddy flowing the opposite direction. Next time you come across a bayou with significant current, see if you can spot an eddy.



Check out the TMN Tuesday presentation for Mar 2021 for more information.

Birdability.org

Birdability focuses on removing barriers to access for birders with mobility challenges, blindness or low vision, intellectual or developmental disabilities (including autism), mental illness, being deaf or hard of hearing, chronic illnesses or other health concerns.



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