



Naturalist Notes



Baby Owl

Some days are simply harder than others,
Your chest is tight, your breath smothered,
Your well-laid plan just came undone
The race is over – you have not won.

But nature can come and offer a balm
That grabs the beast and makes it calm
Offering a hand pulling you from the mire
Bringing some water to toss on the fire.

And so it is with the owl in the box
That says so much as its eyes talk
Telling me that it is safe in there
Telling me that the box means care.

And what a gift the steward has left
The box preventing baby being bereft
Giving safety and comfort till mom is back
And until baby owl gains the flying knack.

Friend Robin greets the owl on her morning walk
If you listen carefully, you can hear them talk
Robin meditating to find a connection
The owl simply happy to aid meditation.

And connected they become, day after day,
Each of them nourished in a spiritual way
One from the connection with a living thing,
The other just excited being a being.

Such is the wonder of the Church of the Earth,
A place that continues to generate worth
Today baby owl comes through for us all
Tomorrow a smile from the blue jay's call.

And upon reflection my day wasn't so bad
As I sit here and smile like a very young lad
For nature has done it once again
And restored good feelings in this old man.

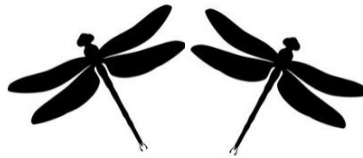
So welcome to Earth Church
Pull yourself up a pew
Take a trip into nature
It's good for you.

Jim Blackburn, with art by Isabelle Chapman

Water of the Month - The Sound of Water

Rushing rivers and waterfalls produce sound. How far away it can be heard as well as the quality of the sound depends on air temperature, season, wind direction, and the shape of the land. In the greater Houston area, elevation changes are generally too gradual to produce whitewater, except when debris or manmade obstacles block the smooth flow. For comparison, the elevation change along Buffalo Bayou's 26 mile paddling trail is about 65 feet, which works out to about 2.5 ft/mile. In contrast, one whitewater park estimates a drop of 125 ft/mile!

Next time you are near a lake when the wind is blowing, listen for the waves hitting the bank, and enjoy the sound of water.



National Estuaries Week 2021 is Sep 18-25

To find events in our area, please visit <https://estuaries.org/get-involved/new/>



Katy Prairie Conservancy to Offer Plots in its Conservation Cemetery in 2022

Combining land restoration and conservation with green burial practices offers a chance to re-imagine the cemetery. Instead of toxic chemicals used in both the embalming process and to maintain the cemetery, natural materials and processes prevail. Individual grave markers will be replaced by a single location listing the names of all interred in the conservation cemetery. Loved ones will be able to locate individual burial sites using GPS. The community will be invited to help restore and maintain the land. For more information, look for Nature's Burial on the www.katyprairie.org website.



Having intelligence, we must not act in ignorance. Having choice, we must not act without responsibility. – Ursula LeGuin

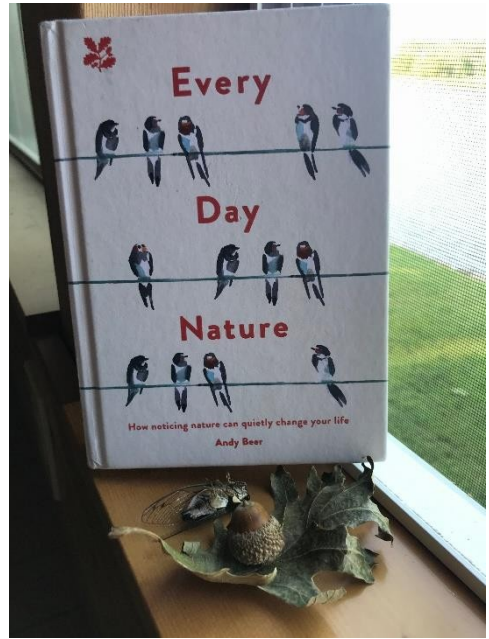
Seen at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, Prairie City, IA

Book Review

Every Day Nature by Andy Beer
2020, Pavilion Books

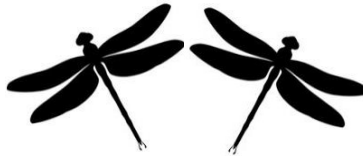
The subtitle of the book, “How noticing nature can quietly change your life”, sums up Andy Beer’s premise. He has written a short, informative, often moving entry for each day of the year. Months are preceded by an introductory page describing some of the major things to expect. His watercolors are sprinkled throughout the book.

For example, on February 4th, “Scrub” describes the tangled roadside bushes that provide shelter for plants and animals. “If you don’t fit in then you get overlooked.” Aug 23rd he reminds us that we have much to learn with “...you discover ten things that you didn’t know that you didn’t know.”



I enjoyed the author’s focus on paying attention to nature, wherever you are. Some of the organisms he describes are not found in our area, which detracts a bit from the usefulness of the book. However, the writing and watercolors and well-written entries are well worth a look.





Southern Skipperlings (*Copaedes minima*)

iNat

A patch of grass
framed by curb
and ditch

just big enough
for two tiny butterflies
mating.

Iirmi Willcockson
Aug 2021

Mimicry in Insects

Many insects show clear examples of evolutionary adaptations that help them best survive in a given environment. In insects a good way to observe this is to see how insects use mimicry.

Take a look at the Yellow Jacket below. What happens when you see a Yellow Jacket close by? Most of us pay attention and give it room if need be. That is because we know that if we agitate the Yellow Jacket, even inadvertently, there is a possibility that we could get stung. And other animals know that possibility as well, including insects. The bright yellow and black marking of the Yellow Jacket are a clear warning to others to be on guard. The sting to an insect may not just be painful, it could be lethal.

So, a good defense for a species is to evolve to look like the Yellow Jacket. Look at the two harmless insets below. The predators of these two insects know about the dangers of the Yellow Jacket. The mimicry is not a perfect disguise, but it is good enough to be very effective against predators. This adaptation is known as Batesian mimicry and many insect species take advantage of this as a survival technique. And the benefit to us? Many of the insects that use mimicry, like the ones below, are beneficial pollinators and a real plus for our gardens.

Greg Brazaitis



Left – Ground Yellow Jacket (anudibranchmom 9/13/21); Center – Six Spotted Longhorn Beetle (gaudettelaure 10/3/20); Right – Long Tailed Aphideater (silveradojim 9/5/21). All images from iNaturalist.

REVIEW: The Bee Short Course for Community Scientists – Building wild bee conservation skills together

The Ohio State University is hosting a webinar series, with a monthly zoom presentation scheduled from May to November 2021. Prior recordings from this series are available at; <https://u.osu.edu/beecourse/recordings/>

The fourth presentation in the series was by Heather Holm, author and biologist. Her talk was titled “Insect Photography and using iNaturalist to observe and document wild bees”. While many of us use iNaturalist to assist in identifications, it was interesting to hear her perspectives as a professional researcher who utilizes the data and her advice as the iNat identifier for over 20,000 observations.

As a researcher biologist she suggested that one should not guess at species level for wild bees, as many bees cannot be identified to species level from a photo. So her advice is If you are unsure about the identification, is to select the best fit from family, subfamily or tribe level. If you choose a species, it takes more experts effort to undo an incorrect identification.

She shared some insight into a couple of different iNaturalist project types:

- Collection projects – observations get automatically added to the project if they meet the project parameters
- Traditional projects – one has to manually add observations to the project, and may be prompted to add additional information to your observation,

There are many State specific native bee projects, with Texas also being covered by the “Native Bees of Eastern North America” which Heather established. Some other Interesting and amazingly specific iNat projects related to native bees include;

- Bees concentrating nectar
- Nesting bees
- Mating bees
- Sleepy bee slumber parties
- Megachile bee leaf cuts

Sam Droege, of the USGS was the September presenter, talking about the USGS Native Bee Inventory and Monitoring Lab. Visit the Bee Short Course website for more information, including webinar recordings when available. <https://u.osu.edu/beecourse/>

Enjoy your native bees
Julie d’Ablaing

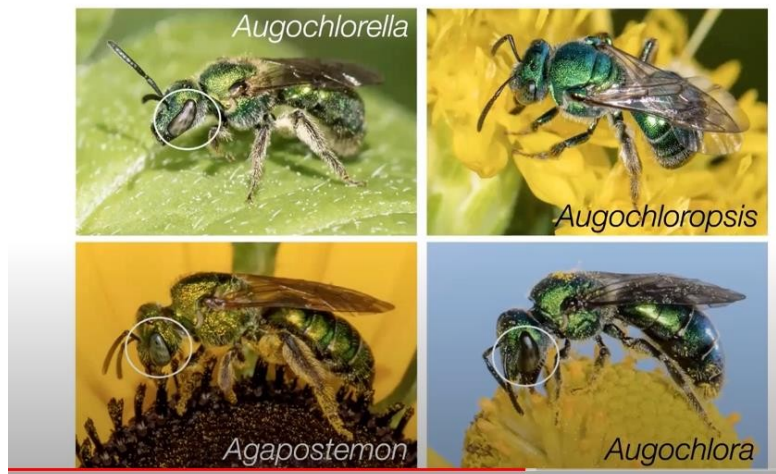
Pollinator Photography Tips by Heather Holm

Use these tips for adding your observations to iNaturalist

- Cropping your photos so that expert identifiers do not have to take the time to zoom in on each image.
- Do not load multiple images that are similar, in respect to the database space / back up required.
- Capture multiple views, eg. Side profile and top view.
- Learn genus-specific characteristics to capture other important angles/views, eg. face burrows, abdominal hairs , eye shape (see example below), tegula color, etc.
- Don't scare off your subject! She suggested the stealth method and/or just letting the bees come to your position.

Learn genus-specific characteristics to capture other important angles/views

Eye Shape





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Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

First described by Carl Linnaeus in 1758, the common grackle is native to the US east of the Rocky Mountains. Adults are black with pale yellow eyes, with males often sporting iridescent feathers around the head.

Common Grackles are omnivorous, foraging on the ground, in shallow water, and on shrubs. They will steal other birds' food. Groups of grackles are referred to as a 'plague'.

While common grackles are abundant and familiar birds, they still hold surprises. Compared to closely related birds, grackles have stronger muscles around the beak and a special projection from the horny palate that allows them to score and crack acorns and other hard nuts. 'Anting' is the practice of rubbing insects on its feathers, possibly to use chemicals such as formic acid against insects, mites, fungi, or bacteria. Lastly, grackles may be sensitive to the Earth's magnetic field.

Source: Wikipedia.org, allaboutbirds.org

