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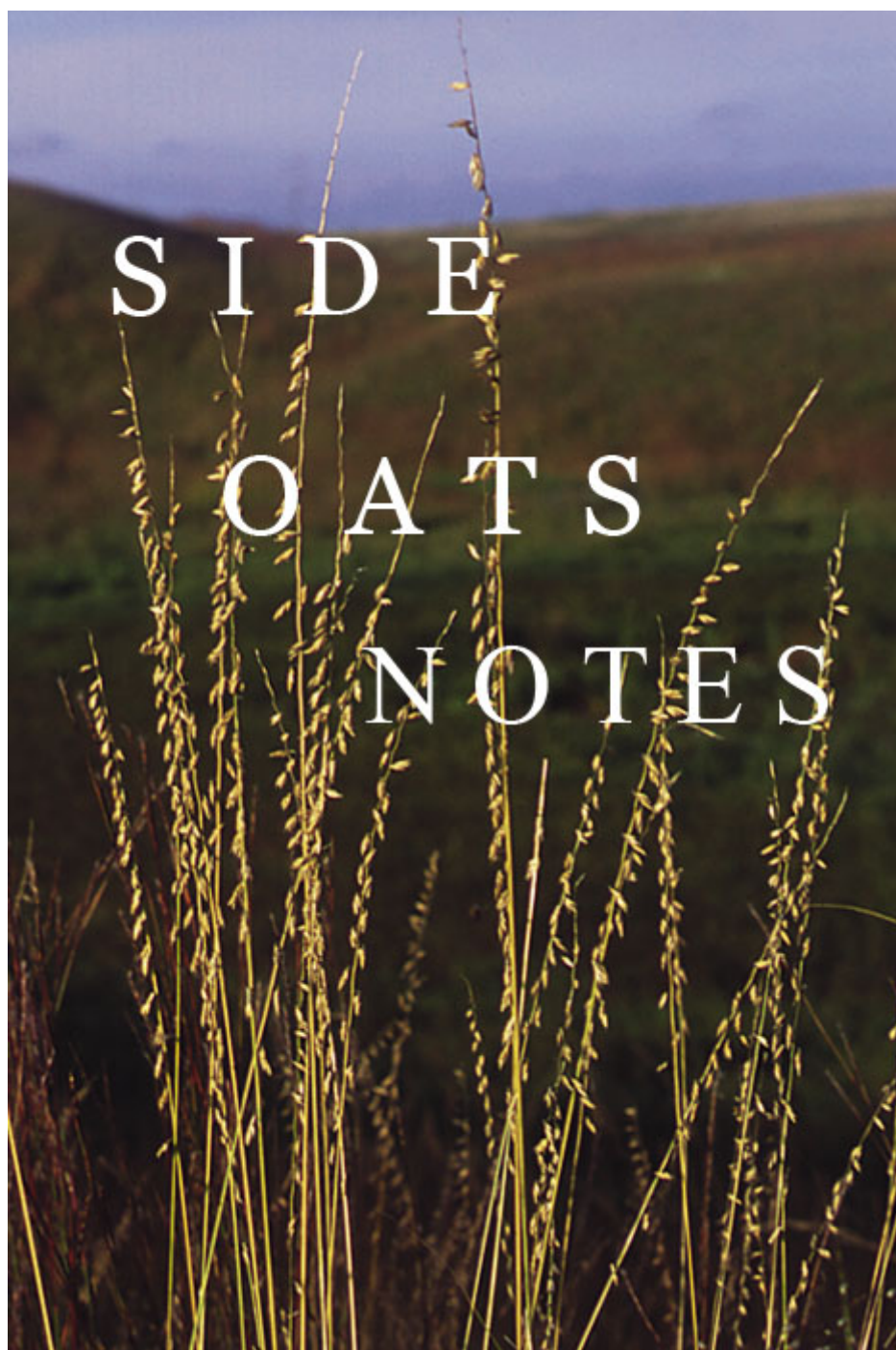
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SIDE OATS NOTES

Summer 2020



A Newsletter for the Prairie Oaks Master Naturalist Chapter

OPENING NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

For over two months this spring I worked from my home office. While it took some adjusting, it actually became a blessing for me. You see, as someone who deals with anxiety and finds joy in nature, it is very important to my mental health that I get enough time outdoors.

Being a transplant from Pennsylvania who has always “run hot”, getting outside in Texas has been no easy task. But working from home made that easier while also making me realize how very important it is for me. And, I don’t think I’m the only one.

This spring I had the privilege of watering my flowers each morning, seeing how they had changed and grown in just a day's time. I learned that at least three Texas Spiny Lizards call my yard home and that ants and aphids love milkweed. And, I enjoyed seeing a pair of cardinals at the bird feeders each day. (My cats liked that too!)

You see, it’s not just important that we go outside, but that we STOP and listen.

Stop and look closely.

Stop and take a deep breath.

Stop and feel— the cool breeze, the warm sun, and the varied textures of the plants around you.

Stop and maybe even taste— basil in my case!

I encourage each and every one of you to go outside, even if just for ten minutes, every single day. Take time to stop and ENJOY nature! It’s important.

Gratefully,
Karen Aho

PrairieOaksMasterNaturalist@gmail.com



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CALENDAR

NOTE:

Although Texas has started to reopen, we will still have (at least) a few months of Covid-influenced Texas Master Naturalist guidelines to follow. Chapter meetings for June and July and possibly August will be held on Zoom. Through June volunteer opportunities will be limited to 10 or fewer people who should practice social distancing. Beginning July 1, larger groups may volunteer, but family groups should still practice distancing. Wearing masks is strongly encouraged when members are in public places.

Please do your best to respect these rules as we are not just representing ourselves, but the wider organization. **What we post on social media AND what folks see in person should be in line with these guidelines.**

If you are having issues connecting electronically for meetings, please reach out to Karen so she can come up with a solution.

prairieoaksmasternaturalist@gmail.com

June 18th: 6:00p POTXMN Chapter Meeting, 7:00p "Oak Wilt", Rachel McGregor, Texas A&M Forest Service.

July 16th: 6:00p POTXMN Chapter Meeting, 7:00p Marvelous Mosquitos, Dr. David Katts, Professor in WSES at Tarleton.

August 20th: 6:00p POTXMN Chapter Meeting, 7:00p Possum Kingdom Fish Hatchery.

October 10th: POTXMN Second Annual Nature Fest, 10:00 to 2:00.

October 15-18, 2020: Texas Master Naturalist Annual State Meeting in Houston, TX.

UPCOMING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Build hours at your convenience and increase your knowledge of native Texas plants. The pollinator garden at the Bosque River Nature Center is divided into plots. You can have your own plot to be maintained according to your schedule. Mentoring is available. Contact Peggy Tolboom at 254-445-3436 or equst@dairysolutionsinc.com to sign up.

Watch your inbox for specific information about volunteering. **However, remember All calendar and volunteer activities will be subject to change to observe then current and appropriate public health and safety guidelines.**

POTXMN's Second Annual Nature Fest in October will have volunteer opportunities. This event may be virtual or in person. As we learn more, Katie will appreciate help from all of us!

Member Spotlight Alisa Terrell Starbird



1. Where were you born? Raised? Born in Galveston, Texas, raised in Stephenville, Texas from 2nd grade through high school
2. Where do you live now? Stephenville, Texas – moved back in 2008 after 25 years in Houston, TX and before that in Austin, TX and in Palo Alto, CA
3. Would you care to share with us about your family? I have two adult children, as well as a daughter in law, and a baby granddaughter! Son Ryan and his wife, Lauren, and adorable baby Phoebe live in DFW area. Ryan is a lawyer with a Dallas firm. Daughter Grey is a theater lighting designer/technical director in Houston. My mom and three siblings and extended family live nearby and are also a big part of my life.
4. What is/has been your career? I am lawyer, mediator, real estate broker with an active law practice (focused on probate and estate, elder, real estate and business law) based in Erath County and surrounding counties. Education? Political science and communications degree from Stanford University; Law degree from University of Texas at Austin

with family and friends

6. To what do you attribute your love of Nature? 1) Frequent trips to the zoo and science museums with family, and reading about and watching videos of animals, plants, geology, and other natural wonders with my children, who were and are as fascinated by them as I am; 2) Hiking and camping with family and friends in state and national parks and the local countryside; 2) My experiences in Scouting, both as a Girl Scout and as a leader of Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts; 3) Volunteering as a docent for many years at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, particularly in the Texas Wildlife exhibit and the Serengeti exhibit.

7. What was it that interested you in the Master Naturalist program? The opportunity to learn fascinating things from great teachers and mentors about our local natural world, and the opportunity to share some of that information with my community.

8. What was it that interested you in the Prairie Oaks chapter? I live in Erath County 😊

9. What has been your greatest takeaway from the POTXMN experience? In addition to all of the advanced training and the expert mentors available through Master Naturalists, I have learned through POTXMN about a myriad of online resources for identifying animals and plants. I love helping friends and family figure out what they have seen; they send me photos or bring me a plant sample, and I reach out to my POTXMN friends and research online to solve the mystery. I am particularly interested in identifying area snakes – which is weird because they have always scared me, but I'm working to curb that response!

10. Describe what would be your perfect, bucket-list natural science encounter or experience. I have three right now: 1) I would love to see a male painted bunting up close; 2) I would be thrilled to see an Eastern hog-nosed snake in the wild and get to handle it (which would mean I would have to be with someone who would help me with that!); 3) there are no reported scientific, documented sightings or other evidence of any Cottonmouth snakes in three of the four counties served by POTXMN (only Palo Pinto County has them, according to records) – many of my friends and family believe they have often seen Cottonmouths in the other three counties, and I am actively seeking photographic evidence (safely obtained, of course) with GPS data included so, if they are right, we can set the record straight!

Report from the Bosque River Nature Center: Satisfied Customers!



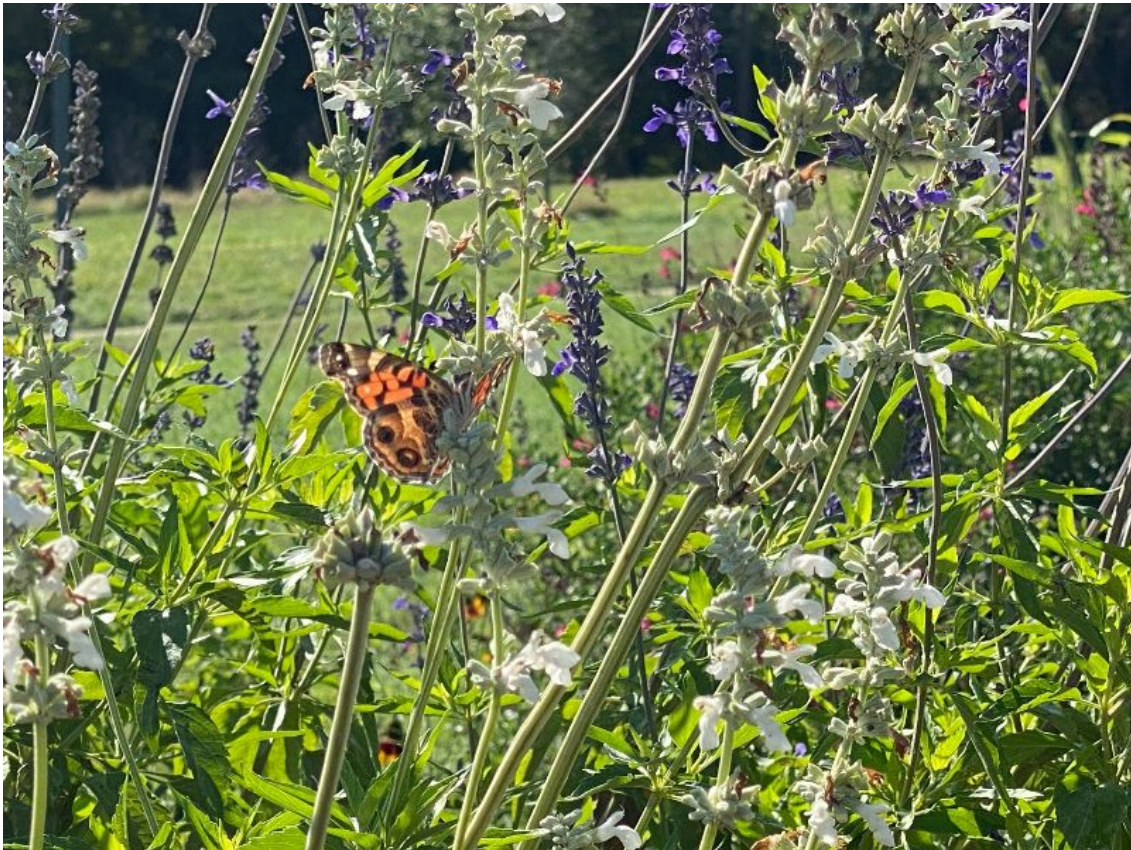
The new sign introduces the Nature Center to the public, including plants currently in bloom, upcoming events, sponsors, and the mission of Prairie Oaks volunteers in conservation outreach and education.

Cow-pen daisies? Snake herb? Henry Duelberg sage? Texas lantana? What do all of these have in common? First, they are all native Texas plants and thus hardy and drought tolerant. Second, they all have beautiful flowers that attract many kinds of pollinator insects. And last but not least, you can see them all growing, along with many other natives, in the beds at the Bosque River Nature Center in Stephenville. This is one of the projects that many Prairie Oaks members have supported over the last four years, with hundreds of hours of volunteer work. Located adjacent to the Bosque River Trail and just yards from the river, the Nature Center is a joint project sponsored by Tarleton State University, the City of Stephenville, and Prairie Oaks Chapter. The site features a winding path of decomposed granite with rock-bordered beds on each side which ends at a group of massive boulders.

Those who venture down the path, will be greeted by clouds of bees and butterflies that erupt from masses of flowers present at various times during the growing season. To stop for a moment amidst the plantings is to discover another world with drama set to the tune of insects at work



Queen Butterflies on Gregg's mistflower.



Painted Lady Butterfly on white variant of Henry Duelberg (mealy) sage.



[Long-horned bee with heavy pollen accumulation on Mexican hat](#)



Green sweat bee on orange daisy.



Diurnal moth (*Ctenucha* sp.) on Mexican hat.

A big challenge for the current year is planning and implementation of improvements supported by a grant from the Texas Urban and Rural Conservation Project of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. The funding will allow for extension of water lines (to provide supplemental water for new plantings), and addition of new native trees and shrubs.

All of the plants in the beds are native to Texas (although some do not occur naturally in this area). Moreover, the Project is looking for cuttings or other transplants of native flowering plants for planting in the fall. If you would like to donate some or if you would like to get involved as a volunteer, contact one of the project leaders (below). There is always plenty of work to be done, and no special expertise is required.

Beyond the boulders of the rock-bordered beds is a larger area envisioned to become a demonstration prairie, which remains a work in progress. The area was originally seeded with a mixture of over forty species of native grasses and forbs. Although many of the species appeared and thrived, recent seasons have seen invasion by aggressive non-native vegetation, which continues to be a challenge. In May, a controlled burn was conducted, in an effort to stimulate development of the desired vegetative community (for a first-person account of the burn see below.) Stay tuned to see what happens next in this continuing experiment!

If you want a chance to see how native plants can create an island of pollinator richness and a spectacular landscaping option, visit the Nature Center today. For those interested in learning to identify native flowering plants, below is a guide to those species that are currently flowering.

Aster family (Asteraceae)

- Orange daisy (*Wedelia texana*)
- Cow-pen daisy (*Verbesina encelioides*)
- Engelmann's daisy (*Engelmannia peristenia*)

- Mexican hat (prairie coneflower) (*Ratibida columnifera*)
- Brown-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Gregg's mistflower (*Conoclinium greggi*)

Evening Primrose family (Onagraceae)

- Pink evening primrose (*Oenothera speciose*)
- Western primrose (*Oenothera hartwegii*)

Mint family (Lamiaceae)

- Henry Duelberg (Mealy) sage (*Salvia farinacea* var. *Henry Duelberg*)
- Autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*)
- American germander (wood sage) (*Teucrium canadense*)

Acanthus family (Acanthaceae)

- Snake-herb (*Dyschoriste linearis*)

Agave family (Agavaceae)

- Red yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*)

Figwort family (Scrophulariaceae)

- Texas sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*)

Verbena family (Verbenaceae)

- Texas lantana (*Lantana urticoides*)

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If you haven't seen the Bosque River Trail Nature Center garden recently, [click here](#) for a great video tour that Bill Hopkins put together!

(Editor's Note: The following first-hand account describing the prescribed burn in the prairie portion of the Bosque River Nature Center is by Dylan Ham, a Tarleton graduate student and member of the 2019 POTXMN class).

On May 20th, I participated in my first-ever prescribed burn. The burn was coordinated by Dr. Darrel Murray and was part of the long-term management plan for the Bosque River Trail Nature Center demonstration prairie. Karen Aho and I were able to assist Dr. Murray, using skills that we learned during our Texas A&M Forest Service wildland fire training and by taking Dr. Murray's course on fire ecology.

The prairie patch was created by Tarleton State University graduate students as an example of historic grassland vegetation. It provides an opportunity for outreach and public education. The Prairie Oaks Chapter, who helps to maintain the area, has discussed the possibility of a prescribed burn for quite some time, with the goal of mimicking the natural cycle of wildfire in grassland ecology.

Fire is an essential process in many ecological communities. Wildfires remove debris and litter from plant communities while recycling the nutrients from the dead material back into the soil. In addition, wildfires also clear space for new vegetation to take hold without competition from existing plants. We are anxious to see what might grow in the prairie now that it has burned.

After acquiring the necessary permit, a small group gathered to conduct the burn. After a preliminary check of the patch and surrounding vegetation, we noted that more than 50% of the patch was a Brome winter-grass species that had dried out and would readily burn. The immediate surrounding vegetation was recently mowed but very green grass-- unlikely to catch on fire. Dr. Murray ignited the fire with a drip torch downwind of the prairie patch. The ignition was downwind to account for the effect of wind direction on fire spread and intensity. When a fire burns with the wind the flames burn hotter and are pushed into the fuel, spreading quickly. Conversely, a fire burning against the wind is pushed away from the fuel and can be smothered by a strong wind. Burning against the wind (a "back burn") was our choice because it was easier to manage and less likely to spread outside of the prairie. Only after about half of the patch had already burned, and the fire's progress had started to falter, was a fire started upwind of the patch (a "head fire") to finish the burn. By the time the fire died out, roughly 90% of the patch had burned. The largest unburnt area had more moisture and green vegetation than the rest of the patch, likely due to the shade of the nearby tree line and its proximity to standing water just the week before.

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[Dylan Ham](#)

Are you aware that you can subscribe to a statewide Texas Master Naturalist email service?

The Texas Master Naturalist Listserv is a resource for Master Naturalist members, chapters, sponsors, advisors and Master Naturalist affiliates to share information and resources specific to the Texas Master Naturalist Program. The listserv is provided as a service to Texas Master Naturalist Program Members and supporters.

This is a great way to stay connected with Texas Master Naturalist statewide program. You may want to subscribe. To subscribe [click here](#)

Editor's Note: The following article and accompanying pictures are by Chris Inbody. For more of Chris' extraordinary photography be sure to click the link below the article.

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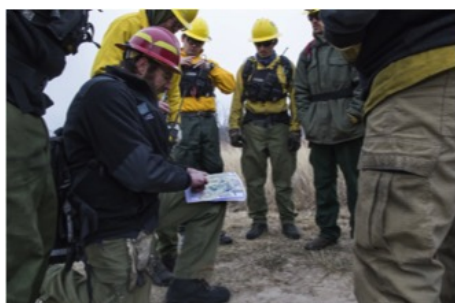
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On April 16, 2020 at 5:59 pm I sat in the living room with Dayna and pondered the future. The world was changing on a daily basis and here we were at the brink of yet another step. As I listened to Prairie Oaks' first ever chapter meeting of the New Era I found comfort in the familiar structure; the dispatch of business issues, the grappling of what to do next, and the recognition of accomplishments. Advanced training for the evening was given by TPWD biologist Cameron Martin who did an excellent job describing his experience participating in prescribed burns. It suddenly occurred to me that I might have some small thing I could share.

At the end of 2017 I was given the opportunity to photograph a prescribed burn at Dinosaur Valley State Park and since I had only ever witnessed this kind of thing as a column of smoke on the horizon I gladly accepted.

As I arrived that morning they had already begun a few fire lines in "Area A", approximately 50 acres which lie adjacent to and NE of the main entrance (Park Road 59) which was made up of a mixture of grassland, Junipers and Oaks. I spent some time familiarizing myself with their plan, introducing myself and understanding the safety protocols. Afterwards I started looking for subjects. "Area A" took the bulk of the morning. In the end it seemed like they wanted a hotter fire that would've gotten into the Junipers, but overall I think they were pleased with the results. As Cameron described, you look for the best conditions of humidity and wind but in the end you take what you get.



FireBoss Kevin Ferguson of TPWD Wildland Fire Management briefs the team before the "Equestrian Area" burn.

The team at the DVSP burn consisted of members of Texas Forest Service, local FD, and TPWD park personnel being led by the "burn boss" Kevin Ferguson from TPWD Wildland Fire Management. Kevin could be seen conducting briefings and zipping around on a four wheeler keeping tabs on where everyone was and the state of the fire. The atmosphere was one of calm, direct professionalism. These people cut their teeth in places like 2011's Bastrop fire and they knew exactly what they were doing.

After lunch, the team decided that conditions warranted moving into "Area B", approximately 25 acres of grassland SW of the park store and referred to as the "Equestrian Area". This time I was on hand to observe the entire process from laying out the burn plan, to the deployment of people and resources and the final rapid sweep of the flame front. They started by initiating a back burn along the river. Once that was stable (45 minutes maybe) they split into two teams who produced flank fires along the east and west of the loop road. This took the most time as they seemed to be using great care to understand the fire's behavior. When the two teams met in the middle of the NE side they closed a "ring of fire" following the contour of the road. I began to get little indications that something

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with plenty of fuel still left in the middle of the ring, the fire started to produce a substantial indraft. What had been a line of flames in the grass that I could see through instantly became a wall of thick white smoke towering hundreds or thousands of feet into the sky. Its base was glowing orange from the flames which seemed no longer to be independent of the cloud. It was over in a matter of a few minutes. The Grand Finale of a fascinating day.



[Enoch, one of the team members, emerges from the Area B conflagration.](#)



Map of DVSP and targeted burn areas in December 2017

[More images](#)

[To learn more about prescribed burns](#)



TPWD episode 2614 featuring the Wildland Fire Team and Kevin Ferguson

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KUDOS

For reaching 250 volunteer hours: Peggy Tolboom and Ann Wood

For re-certification (in the midst of a pandemic): Bill Hopkins, Dayna Inbody, Peggy Tolboom, Linda Wood, and Lynn Wood



Nature in Poetry

In previous issues we've highlighted poetry focused on Wild Geese, Owls, Salamanders, Butterflies and Trees. Now we get to the basics. Poetry, specifically Sharon Olds, explores Dirt. Everything starts with dirt. It nourishes plants, which harvest energy from sunlight, which fuels the entire biosphere.

Ode to Dirt

Dear dirt, I am sorry I slighted you,
I thought that you were only the background
for the leading characters—the plants
and animals and human animals.
It's as if I had loved only the stars
and not the sky which gave them space
in which to shine. Subtle, various,
sensitive, you are the skin of our terrain,
you're our democracy. When I understood
I had never honored you as a living
equal, I was ashamed of myself,
as if I had not recognized
a character who looked so different from me,
but now I can see us all, made of the
same basic materials—
cousins of that first exploding from nothing—
in our intricate equation together. O dirt,
help us find ways to serve your life,
you who have brought us forth, and fed us,
and who at the end will take us in
and rotate with us, and wobble, and orbit.

Sharon Olds

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Sharon Olds is one of contemporary poetry's leading voices. Winner of several prestigious awards, including the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award, Olds is known for writing intensely personal, emotionally scathing poetry that graphically depicts family life as well as global political events. Olds has also won fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. She was New York State Poet from 1998 to 2000, and currently teaches in the graduate writing program at New York University.



We are asking all of our members to consider this proposition:

Describe what would be your perfect bucket-list natural science encounter or experience.

Please share yours with us by emailing it to bob@abwoodpk.com. Each issue we will include some of these, reserving some for future issues. You can be as brief or as thorough as you want. We will edit, if necessary. Thanks in advance for yours and thanks to these contributors. Here's this batch:

- Bob Wood: My Bucket List experience would be to spend time in the Amazon River Basin. To extend it to my Natural Science Fantasy, I would discover a new plant species that has medicinal qualities to cure cancer or Alzheimers or racial discrimination.
- Nothing more here because you didn't submit yours.

Share your dream!

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY:

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— [Edmund Burke \(Anglo-Irish Statesman and Philosopher 1729-1797\)](#)

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