

THE GREEN BIRD IN AUGUST



With a green bird in August,
you know you can't go wrong

ESSAYS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Joseph C. Neal
2013

“Yesterday after lunch I walked east along the inside beach to the gap and around on the outside to the bullrush pool. I did a circuit of it drawing dragon flies. I heard a little green heron complaining and saw white guano beneath a pine branch. Then I looked up into a dead pine beyond, and saw a young heron climb up using feet, wings, and the point of its bill. Then it reached a branch and stood -- and stretched and stretched, silhouetted against an enormous white cloud. It seemed that with very little it would climb the cloud and take the kingdom of heaven by force -- God knows it needs taking. I drew it in ecstasy. It was a concentrated image that nothing could take from me. If it was not poetry it was the image asked for by Yeats from which poetry is made. I am a painter so this morning I did two watercolors of it before I got out of bed. This does not mean that I am going to be content with that one image for the rest of my life. It will generate power in me for a while, then I need another. One image succeeds another with surprising regularity on Horn Island. Whether they could be shared is another matter-- people need different things.”

-- from The Horn Island Logs of Walter Inglis Anderson (Sugg, editor, 1973)

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PREFACE

In THE GREEN BIRD IN AUGUST I'm sharing my views about the warm season in northwest Arkansas, mainly April to October. This opens when buntings show up out in the fields, through sunflowers and ripe tomatoes, and closes when Blue-winged Teal head south and American Coots take up winter residence. There are also side trips to favorite spots, like the pawpaw grove at Lake Atalanta in Rogers and maybe looking ahead to some fun winter birding.

With a green bird in August, you know you can't go wrong. This speaks for itself. For example, how can you possibly go wrong when you're out with binoculars, a few friends, or a bunch from Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society and Arkansas Native Plant Society, looking for a Painted Bunting, especially a green one and in the process – say on a trip to Chesney Prairie Natural Area -- stumble on a patch of Oklahoma grass pink orchids? Or the Barbara's Buttons at Ninestone Land Trust? Or *Palafoxia callosa* blooming on limestone glade remnants above Beaver Lake? Or examining the other worldly purple flowers of pawpaws, or a timber rattler under a flowering umbrella magnolia above the Buffalo River?

You can't go wrong with this stuff, and there's nothing wrong, either with testing the hypothesis that it is OK to plant tomatoes when pawpaws have set fruit.

Many of these essays involve birds, since with brilliant feathers and complex songs, they clearly own title to a chunk of our shared universe. But not only birds. Out there in the same warm bunting season are ashy sunflowers, prairie kingsnakes and violent thunderstorms. This book is also about how winny calls of an Eastern Screech-Owl blends with early morning sounds of the city recycle truck collecting on my street at first light.

I had fun collecting the images paired with essays. I was trying to find the center of my days. I credit life, quite evident in the warm months and especially the green bird in August. Credit also goes to an inexpensive digital camera that allowed me to record that moment when the unexpected popped up to kick-start my spirit. Other credits belong to companions who joined me on many of these trips. In this regard, I especially credit Joan Reynolds, whose sharp eyes for all things great and small, and especially flowers and bumblebees, added so much to many of these trips.

These essays appeared in various forms and in various places in 2012 and 2013. Some started out on my facebook page others on ARBIRD, the online discussion list for birds and birders in Arkansas. Some got started in the middle of the night, when I should have been sleeping.

The closest brush with profundity may be my thought, expressed here and there, that life is about more than just US.— Joe Neal

THE GREEN BIRD IN AUGUST

WELCOME TO THE NATURAL STATE April 3



American Golden-Plovers are in Arkansas River valley farmlands just east of Van Buren today. Flocks of 43, 20, 350+, 85, 625+, 211 equals 1,334, and more went uncounted. My highest counts are near the sod farm, corner of Crawford Road and Westville south of Kibler where I park in deep mud of a farm road. I see them in their typical plover upright stance, watchful, dignified. They walk-stop-look. Then come sudden flushes. Plover flocks are tight, their movements synchronous. They sweep low over wet short grass fields, then down again. I think this may be one reason why birds fascinate. A big open field without obvious animation one day suddenly becomes the center of a spectacular pilgrimage. We in the valley are a middling stop on the route from winter in South America to summer northern Alaska and Canada. Midway more less, that is, involving thousands of miles and unseen perils, Argentine pampas of golden-plover winter to their arctic tundra of summer. Welcome to the Natural State.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW JUST PASSING THROUGH. SO ARE WE April 4



Lincoln's Sparrow showed at my feeder in Fayetteville this week. Unlike the more numerous White-throated Sparrows, Lincoln's mainly ignores my comings and goings. I like the grays and the browns, the fine markings, that yellow wash with streaks on its breast. Even if they don't have one of our paper deeds, and even if they don't pay county taxes, they own the place, even if they are just passing through; for that matter, so are we. I was a Southern Baptist long enough to understand belief. I have never lost the sense that we are greater than the apparent sum of our parts. Our get ahead-at-any-cost culture, the one that tries to super size everything no matter cost or loss, undermines us. My preferred antidote: birds. If it works for birds, it may work for us.

ROARING OIL WELL AS DUCK WHISPERER April 5



Last year's rice fields along Blackland Road, immediately northeast of Frog Bayou WMA, are filled with teal. I was able to slide and spin a short distance on Blackland's spring mud. But it didn't get me to the fields north of the road where, periodically, an intriguing cloud of teal rose and resettled. A friendly man driving a tractor said fresh gravel had been added to a well pad road that goes right into the middle of the rice field. I was welcome! Ducks took flight as I drove toward a working pumpjack and roaring engine, storage tanks. Next to the engine house, scope on the window, studying teal, in the shadow of fierce mechanical noise, ducks went about their business. Didn't flinch when the engine periodically coughed. Roaring oil well as duck whisperer? Working roaring popping squeaking energy extraction and calm teal. I estimate 1,400 teal, 70% Blue-winged, the rest Green-winged, plus a few Northern Shovelers and Mallards. In addition, there were at least 850 American Golden-Plovers, numbers of Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, plus Pectoral and Least Sandpipers, Wilson's Snipe, and Savannah Sparrows everywhere.

CRANE STORY April 14



In August 2012 I heard from Brian Infield of Arkansas Game and Fish who'd seen a Sandhill Crane immediately northeast of Frog Bayou WMA, south of Dyer, in the Arkansas River Valley. I found it in an extensive field along Blackland Road on August 20, 2012. Its right wing was injured. Now Bill Beall and Jim Nieting have found 3 cranes in the same area, starting on April 8. The injured bird is missing a series of flight feathers that leaves the tip of the wing looking like it has a big hole bitten from it. Joan Reynolds and I saw the birds flying. The two uninjured birds gained altitude faster, with the injured-wing bird slower and lower – but in flight. At distance, we also saw some crane dancing, but were unsure which birds were involved. Sandhill Cranes form cohesive family groups, involving parents and off spring, at least in the first year. Was what we are seeing out there now a family group interrupted at some point by a wing injury to one? If yes, was the group passing through the Arkansas Valley in spring migration, and the injured bird only spotted later?

GODWIT JACKPOT April 18



We hit the spring migration jackpot today, especially with Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits. The stage was set when last night and this morning a strong warm front collided with a strong cold front. There were big thunders in the night and then as much as 4 inches of rain. Big fields were widely turned into bird-filled playas. At Vaughn in the rain, a couple of miles south of Centerton, Mike Mlodinow saw Upland Sandpipers (9), then a Marbled Godwit and Willet, along with Blue-winged Teals in flooded fields. We headed for the hatchery, but then found another Marbled Godwit right along the road. Now the rain was tapering off, air cooling. At the hatchery, here came flock after flock (100, 75, 85, 12) of Franklin's Gulls, in breeding plumage. We decided to head over toward Chesney Prairie Natural Area at Siloam Springs. Adjacent Chesney Prairie NA, we had Upland Sandpipers (8), plus a flock (15) of Brewer's Blackbirds. A former small pond just southeast of Chesney had become an extensive shallow lake. Included along its new shoreline were Willets (3), Hudsonian (2) and Marbled (2) Godwits, American Golden-Plovers (85), etc. Today we had a vision of a migration as it must have been in a distant, pre-settlement past. Then, the many tribes of shorebirds, including Eskimo Curlews, hurried north through what is now western Arkansas, stopping only when, as today, big fronts collided. We tallied 18 shorebird species for the day.

SOME WITH WELL-DEVELOPED WHITE BORDERS April 24



Birding the Arkansas River Valley south of Kibler was fun today, especially IF you like mud hogging. The roads were wretched after rain yesterday. I thought we might find a bunch of Upland Sandpipers, but we were satisfied with the one. Seven Swainson's Hawks, mostly in the vicinity of the sod farm at Westville & Crawford Roads, provided compensation, as did two juvenile Bald Eagles along East Arnold Road, plus a singing Western Meadowlark.

Later in the afternoon, Joan Reynolds and I spent an hour at Woolsey Wet Prairie in Fayetteville. First up, Upland Sandpipers (6), soon followed by White-faced Ibises, some with well-developed white borders (5), and finally Wilson's Phalaropes (7), plus other shorebird species and lots of Savannah Sparrows, with remarkable yellow eyebrows (supercilium).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRDS April 27



It rained and thundered all night, misted off and on all day, but that didn't stop our Together Green habitat work at Chesney Prairie Natural Area. Hosts were Chesney Land Steward Joe Woolbright plus Dan and Samantha Scheiman from Audubon Arkansas. I had trouble getting started on the work end because there were so many migrating Savannah Sparrows to look at (more than 30 perched on one fence) and Upland Sandpipers (8). Sam needed Yellow-headed Blackbird as a state bird, so after working a while, and watching a Gray-cheeked Thrush in the little streamside woodland, we moved to a partially flooded field a mile south of Chesney. I was looking all around, with able assistance from Joan Reynolds, studying all blackbirds and starlings, when I noticed Dan waving in the car behind. Sam had found her own Yellow-headed Blackbird and we were soon enjoying number 2, that Dan spotted. That flooded field also hosted Wilson's Phalaropes (8), American Golden-Plovers (~40), Long-billed Dowitchers in brilliant reddish plumage (31; identified by keek calls), Blue-winged Teal, and many Savannah Sparrows. Joan noticed the overflight of a small blackbird flock that included more Yellow-headed (10).

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOOS COO-COOING ON WHITNEY MOUNTAIN May 1



Whitney Mountain is on the north side of Beaver Lake, part of the Lost Bridge community. If you take Arkansas 127 south from Garfield for about around four miles, you get to interesting mid- slope mature hardwood forest. Whitney Mountain Lodge above, and facing north and east are deep forested ravines. The upper elevation at the lodge is about 1800 feet. From the shoulder along 127 we look into around 1300. Joan Reynolds and I were there for Cerulean Warblers and they cooperated; a minimum of seven heard and/or seen from the 127 shoulder along about 0.8 miles of north and northeast-facing slopes. Joan heard coo-cooing down the road and we soon had in view several in view a migrating flock (?) of Black-billed Cuckoos (at least 4) with Yellow-billed Cuckoos in the same area. Lots of Hooded and Kentucky Warblers, American Redstarts, and a Yellow-breasted Chat in a powerline clearing. At one point, Red-eyed Vireos engaged in chase, with 3 perched in a flowering pawpaw along the roadside.

DEVIL'S DEN & BIRDER'S WEEKEND, IN SNOW May 4



This is Birder's Weekend at Devil's Den State Park. I left Fayetteville in a steady slush that became big wet flakes on the way, then dense fog as I descended into the Den, and then back to slush at the meeting spot on Lee Creek. Interpreter Rebekah Penny arrived in her brown Smoky Bear hat with clear plastic cover and loaner binoculars for anyone who needed them. Turn-out, not so surprising: modest. We stood under a golf umbrella, acted brave, and listened to Tennessee Warblers singing. An oriole singing proved to be a first year male with black mask, wet and undeterred. Slush turned to mist, mist to a crack of more open sky. Taking heart, or perhaps tuned into their own weather channel, vultures (10, both species) looked for soaring opportunities. We were only a little wet ourselves, so off we went. We soon had Eastern Wood-Pewee (2), Great Crested Flycatcher (4), a flock of Baltimore Orioles (8), more Orchard Orioles (4), three vireo species (Red-eyed, Yellow-throated, Warbling), Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (3), Swainson's Thrushes (8), Broad-winged Hawk (1), plus these warblers: Tennessee (10), Orange-crowned (2), Nashville (4), Northern Parula (4), Yellow (1), Chestnut-sided (2), Yellow-rumped (3), Yellow-throated (3), Blackpoll (1), Northern Waterthrush (1), Louisiana Waterthrush (2), Common Yellow-throat (5), and others missed due to fogged glasses. We also had Summer Tanager (1), and Scarlet Tanager (3), Blue Grosbeak (3), Indigo Bunting (5). Bluebirds were undeterred. Just goes to prove that bad weather is often midwife of good birding.

SAVANNAHS SINGING, SPOTTEDS WALKING THE ROADS May 10



A blast from a storm system last night about knocked me out of my bed. I woke three times thinking I was hearing Sandhill Cranes. Early this morning when I got up to the former prairies now pastures in the Vaughn-Centerton area of Benton County, fields and roads were flooded from 6 inches of rain; playa day. It was also drivers coming at you in your lane day, because their lane was flooded. Spotted Sandpipers and Lesser Yellowlegs walked all kinds of roads and flooded fields, happily I assume. A big snapping turtle found suitable passage along the wet road. Roads covered with debris. A pasture just south of the hatchery was half playa and shallow stream, perfect for almost 100 Blue-winged Teal. I also saw Buff-breasted Sandpipers (3), Willet (1), Stilt Sandpiper (1), White-rumped Sandpiper (~20), Wilson's Phalaropes (15+), American Golden-Plover (2; 1 in near breeding plumage), Baird's Sandpiper (at least 6), plus another 7 sandpiper species, and an overflight of two Egyptian Geese. Maybe best of all, the deluge did nothing to dim spirits of Savannah Sparrows, singing from wires along the wet pastures.

SWITCHING SUBJECTS ON THE BUFFALO May 14



I wrote Cargill about my concern that wastes from a huge hog farm in Newton County could impact the integrity of the Buffalo National River. Even with reported safeguards built into this Newton County operation, extensive pollution in other states with huge hog farms breeds skepticism. “We also understand the importance of properly managing and using resources in a way that is compatible with local environments,” Cargill responded. I hope so. Some folks are trying to switch the subject from the importance of the Buffalo NNR to how we supposedly don’t appreciate farmers. Discussion of how a huge hog farm could harm the Buffalo is not anti-farming. I accept as sincere the statements by some involved in the hog farm that they deeply care about the Buffalo, and water quality in general, as much as any life member of the Ozark Society. I welcome these testimonials. Amen. Questions and ensuing controversy has never been about the sincerity and good intentions of these farmers. It is about the sincerity and good intentions of national and international corporations profiting despite huge pollution messes elsewhere when hog production has become concentrated. It is also about our public agencies that failed to take the Buffalo’s direct interest into account before backing loans and issuing permits. It was President Reagan, after all, who said “Trust, but verify.”

THE GOOD NEWS May 17



The Green Heron in this picture was at Woolsey Wet Prairie here in Fayetteville this morning. It was spreading some news, because as I watched, it said SKEE-OOW repeatedly, and in a low voice that carries a long ways, no doubt for other Green Herons I didn't see. Or perhaps for me? Judging from the smile on its face, and just perching right out there in the morning sun, and calling away, I'm guessing it was some good news. I took it that way. SKEE-OOW. I understand this about as well as the news I hear on the radio, whatever it means.

STUNNING HYBRID AT THE BUFFALO May 20



Yesterday morning I photographed an Indigo Bunting X Lazuli Bunting hybrid, a stunning study in deep blue and sharp white, much like the one in Big Sibley, page 470 (picture with this essay). This bird was on the creek side of Arkansas Game and Fish's interesting and educational Elk Education Center in Ponca, in the valley of the Buffalo National River. I also saw regular Indigo Buntings. Louisiana Waterthrushes were acting like they were probably feeding young on the lower part of the hillside across the creek in the same area. We watched a fledgling Eastern Phoebe being fed. My visit to Ponca yesterday was to lead a field trip for a group of folks who made financial contributions to Ozark Natural Science Center, battling to stay alive after 20 productive years. You would think no such battle to just keep the doors open would be required considering our society's vast wealth and the natural world upon which this wealth is based. Think again and consider helping.



When my daughter was growing up, I regularly took her and friends to swim and hike in the upper Buffalo National River. When they needed the potty, they used a basic one at the low water bridge. For probably about the same period I have lead groups of bird watchers, like those who come out for Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society field trips. I also make special trips, like yesterday's fund raiser for Ozark National Science Center. Potties were locked. Potties are necessary for everyone, including birders. A contingent in Congress is unwilling to have upper income citizens, billionaires, pay a little more in taxes. Instead, they demand the whole Federal government shrink. One direct consequence is locked potties. More than 300,000 people live in the urbanized portions of northwest Arkansas. If we visit a National Park, it is the Buffalo. So just how are we being served by the forced flat-lining of Park Service budgets and locked bathrooms in a park visited by more than one million people every year? Maybe we need to take Congress on a tour, and tell them when they need the potty just head out there in the chiggers and poison ivy. You made the mess. Go potty out there in the weeds with the rest of us. I'll help lead the tour, if anyone is interested in birds. That's my friend Jacque Brown waving by the waterfall in Lost Valley where the main potty was locked.

PRAIRIE DOWITCHER AT CENTERTON May 21



We've had an all day rain today in northwest Arkansas, mostly all day lightning, some impressive thunder, just perfect for shorebirding at Craig state fish hatchery in Centerton. Among shorebirds, a Dunlin with black patch, a Black-bellied Plover in winter garb, several Stilt Sandpipers, all dark bars and red highlights on the face, a single adult Bald Eagle, flocks of White-rumped Sandpipers, Blue-winged Teal (25), Northern Shovelers (4), plus others. One shorebird really caught my eye. Hanging out with the Stilt Sandpipers, a single Short-billed Dowitcher of the prairie form, *hendersoni*. On a day with rain and 100% overcast, the orangey reds of this bird radiate, as do feathers on its back, a bold golden pattern with contrasting black. The bill is heavier when directly contrasted with the stilts, but no longer or at least not much longer. The hatchery and Centerton itself are both on former tallgrass prairie, with abundant springs, and in weather like we are having, standing water in usually dry fields. A lot has changed since the days of bison and prairie-chickens, but shorebirds still move through this country, still claiming it as their own. At this time of year, many like this striking prairie dowitcher carry with them intentions about the future, the bright plumage of nesting season.

GOOD YEAR FOR BISON AT TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE May 23



I'm just back from a quick trip to The Nature Conservancy's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern Oklahoma. There were many interesting birds, for sure, but it is hard to top ma bison with her golden calf. There were quite a few calves in a herd right along the road. A good year for bison, a good year for the earth. Ma is shedding her old fur, getting ready for summer. I know this photograph looks very close, but I was actually in my car on the county road. The photograph is taken through the spotting scope I usually use for birding.

WAITING FOR THE TURTLE May 24



The creature in this photograph is an ornate box turtle, a resident of the plains and prairies. I photographed it while crossing the road at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern Oklahoma during my trip this week. There is a lot of gas and oil production traffic on the main road through the Preserve, so I moved the three I saw into the grass. They all closed tightly when I picked them up. I put one in an open area where bison had tramped down the grass, got a folding chair out of my car, and watched the turtle at some distance through my scope. NOTHING happened for quite a while, or at least nothing in the way we usually view something. Then after about 30 minutes, the front hinge S L O W L Y opened, a nose appeared, and at about 40 minutes, eyes and neck folds. Then, in a relative flash, out came legs and he was off, gone to the grass and the wild blue indigos. The pace appeals to me. The opportunity to sit and wait for a turtle.

LOOKS LIKE A DINOSAUR, SURVIVED THE GREAT EXTINCTION

May 24



I know this looks like a dinosaur that survived the great extinction, but it is actually an eastern collared lizard, a spectacular but fairly common resident of extensive rock outcroppings TODAY on The Nature Conservancy's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern Oklahoma. In Arkansas I've heard them called "mountain boomers." They can still be found in Arkansas in a few, scattered extensively open rocky glades, but we have mostly lost our mountain glades due to fire suppression and subsequent successful invasion of glades by cedars and other vegetation. As in the case of the bison image I posted yesterday, I was watching this boomer from my car, using a spotting scope.

INDIGO BUSH: BOTANICAL SPECTACULAR May 26



Most of the year, indigo bush seems run-of-the-mill, not up there with the lilies and other stars of botanical world. Yet, come May in a moist prairie, indigo pushes up these spectacular spikes, elegant deep purple masses and golden lights. Veritable star of pollinating insect world, flowers buzz with creativity of a productive factory. I admire indigo's indomitable spirit, its persistence. You can drain it, plow it, pave it, Walmartize it as far as the eye can see, but somewhere there's a scrap of old prairie missed, where there's some water and soil and sunlight, and indigo's indomitable spirit. Conspiring against our proud modernity, it pushes up majestic spikes, signals to us and our spirits, sparkling light houses.

BOOT CAMP FOR JUVENILE GREAT BLUES May 27



Great Blue Herons at the state fish hatchery at Centerton this morning were foraging in shallow water. They were watched with considerable interest by red-eared sliders, noses, eyes, and red “ears” just above the water. The Great Blues included an adult in immaculate plumage of the nesting season and a juvenile out of this year’s nest. The adult did a lot of standing around, just occasionally grabbing crayfish. The juvenile also caught crayfish, but only after much walking and much empty-billed stabbing. This juvenile is probably recently out of a nest, maybe from a rookery on the Illinois River or from up at Bella Vista. This reminds me of how everything is connected: protecting rookeries, healthy streams with crayfish and turtles, public lands like the hatchery, and how we, like juvenile herons, must learn how to get along in the world. My favorite moment: adult with a freshly caught crayfish, juvenile intently looking on. I’m sure the turtles wondered what all the poking was about, wisely stayed well out of the way.

NIGHTHAWKS IN THE DAY May 29



Lately I've been hearing loud, nasal PEENT calls from above -- Common Nighthawks darting in the night sky around town, almost bat-like, especially where there are big lighted places like car lots that also attract large flying insects. Of course they're not actually hawks -- rather, close relatives of Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-wills-widows. Nighthawks go blasting through the night sky after juicy moths and flying beetles, but I never get really good looks at them, except, that is, when I get over at The Nature Conservancy's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern Oklahoma. There, corrals constructed from heavy steel drill stem pipes seem to make perfect day time perches. I've seen them a few times perched horizontally on a thick limb of an oak around northwest Arkansas. They look like big lumpy lichens and seem sort of camouflaged. Not so out on the prairie. Nighthawks there settle for the steady comfort of drill stem and there's no hiding at all. You drive by and they pay little attention. Maybe a sleepy eye opens just a l i t t l e bit, but that's about all, unless you deliberately disturb them. Here's a picture of one from last week.

GOATSUCKERS May 30



The apparently small bill on the Common Nighthawk is deceptive. Look at that picture I posted last night – how could a bird like that ever catch a big moth while on the wing, IN THE AIR? The answer is illustrated by an additional photograph from July 2010. Common Nighthawks, Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-wills-widows are “goatsuckers” (from old stories that they sucked milk from goats) in the family Caprimulgidae. That little bill is just the obvious point on a huge gape that opens widely enough to accommodate a big moth and even an unfortunate small bird! They fly through the air scooping up lots of sizeable insects. This photo is also from The Nature Conservancy’s Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern Oklahoma.

LEAST SANDPIPER MAYBE FROM PERU May 30



CAN YOU READ THESE NUMBERS/LETTERS? This is a photograph of the Least Sandpiper we saw at the Craig State Fish Hatchery at Centerton during the Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society field trip on May 25. We saw this bird, and the yellow flag on its right leg, but unfortunately, it did not then occur to me that I should have just camped out with my spotting scope until I had a clear read on the numbers/letters. Yellow flags like this one are attached to birds in Peru (or recently in French Guiana) as part of the Pan American Shorebird Program. It will be impossible to get more information about this bird unless I can get info off this flag. So can anyone help? I guess this would be called crowd sourcing or citizen science. I think we all have a stake in understanding how we are connected to the rest of the world. If you feel like you can tell what is on this flag, or have a good guess at least, please post a response. Don't be shy now! I'll send the community's best guesses back to the bird banding lab and see if they can get more information for us. Thanks. Here is my best (admittedly not good) photo showing the flag.

PRAIRIE-CHICKENS AND JACK RABBITS May 31



STEVE ERWIN, neighbor, retired postal worker, volunteer at Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, has for years studied northwest Arkansas newspapers. Recently he gave me this from the Springdale News, March 20, 1896: "Jerome Cowan has shipped 2515 rabbits from here this winter. One jack rabbit. There are several jack rabbits west of Lowell. No one knows how they got here." October 23, 1896, had this: "... flock of prairie chickens being seen east of town. Along in '69 and '70, prairie chickens were quite numerous in this section, but they have all long since migrated and these are the first that have been seen here for several years. A genuine specimen of jack rabbit is also reported in the same neighborhood." Switch to 2013: Dickcissels singing in every grassy field as summer comes on. It's the old prairie, minus jack rabbits. In late summer, huge sawtooth sunflowers covered with yellow blooms. It's the old prairie, minus chickens. We now know both disappeared. We may still be damned, as Mark Twain put it, but at least we have shed purposeful ignorance. We travel from myth to potential enlightenment. The story not recognized in 1896 was steady decline of Ozark prairies. The story today is that we may choose to alter our lifestyles, change the laws and directions, preserve rare habitat. We band a hummingbird and follow it to undiscovered continents.

THE BUFFALO AND THE LAW OF GRAVITY June 4



This is the upper part of the Buffalo River. The river is hidden in the green depths. I took this photograph on June 2 while looking southwest from the Cave Mountain bluffline. This is the landscape that draws millions of visitors to the Buffalo: ancient tabletop plateau deeply eroded by the river running below. Species of plants and animals adapted to such rugged country adds to the Buffalo's uniqueness. The human population has always been low: few roads, too isolated, very little farmable land, mostly small family farms and almost no industry. Mechanically, over vast time, everything on the plateau eventually winds up in the river. Gravity rules in the Cave Mountain area, and downriver, around Mt Judea, where a hog confined animal feeding operation (CAFO) has been built on the plateau, alongside Big Creek, a Buffalo tributary. Cargill, corporate food processor behind this CAFO, operates under an industrial-science hubris that they have conquered nature, confident millions of gallons of untreated hog waste spread high above the Buffalo won't pollute the river. But, hubris that ups the corporate bottomline doesn't trump the Law of Gravity.

HENSLOW'S SPARROW AT PRAIRIE STATE PARK June 8



DAVID CHAPMAN and I spent yesterday at Prairie State Park in southwest Missouri, just north of Joplin. The prairie is covered with many species of wildflowers and we had great looks at Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows, Dickcissels, Bell's Vireos, and others. A lush, tall, white penstemon was in full bloom, scattered throughout, and so it was no surprise that a Henslow's Sparrow perched right atop one, in a grove of 4-foot tall penstemons, giving CHE-LICK! calls that were answered by another distant singer. Alternatively, the bird perched on the deeply toothed leaves of sawtooth sunflowers, now only 1-foot tall, but heading for 8-10 feet eventually. Bell's Vireos are numerous in the dense thickets formed by winged sumac and low, shrubby prairie dogwoods that were in full bloom. Compared to last year, flowering seems at least two weeks later. During a trip last year on May 23, the goat's rue was widespread and in flower, but none of it was flowering yesterday. Last year on May 23, we saw regal fritillaries all over common milkweed and butterfly milkweed, but neither of these striking plants were in bloom yesterday – and not so surprising, no regal fritillaries, either.

PALE PURPLE CONEFLOWER LANDSCAPE AT BAKER PRAIRIE June 8



PALE PURPLE CONEFLOWER LANDSCAPE at Baker Prairie Natural Area in Harrison. Great time to go see a remarkable flora display, and not just coneflowers. Not just sky. Also, saw Willow Flycatchers, the only place where they are now known to nest in Arkansas.

FAME FLOWERS IN BLOOM AT NINESTONE LAND TRUST June 9



These fame flowers are in bloom on the Ordovician Period (485-443 million years before present) sandstone glades at Ninestone Land Trust in Carroll County. These small, delicate flowers open briefly, an hour or two, in the afternoon. We saw buds in the morning, but when we returned around 2:30 PM, they were open for business. The flat sandstones on these glades are covered with the ripple marks of an ancient sea. Time is a funny thing – sea to flowerbed – and today, with the singing of Field Sparrows, Indigo Buntings, and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, plus our group from the Native Plant Society. Don Matt and Judith Griffith were hosts.

MOURNING CLOAK AT NINESTONE LAND TRUST June 11



Since we have learned the National Security Agency is reading and saving all of our online stuff - you never know when one of us might turn terrorist after all -- I think we all have a duty to make sure it is interesting or at least educational. I haven't proclaimed my allegiance to butterflies recently, so here's a Mourning Cloak butterfly we saw at Ninestone Land Trust last Sunday. Hope they have room to store it with the rest -- if they like it anyway --

PERHAPS IT IS ABOUT SOME OBSCURE SPECIES June 11



Same folks who say President Obama's birth certificate is a fraud are convinced White River Watershed National Blueway is an attempt by the United Nations to grab 17.8 million acres from the American people. Here's a snippet from their website: "The whole purpose of this Blueway is to take over ALL land and Surface Water . . . the goals are to rewild over 50% of the United States . . . so some obscure endangered species won't be threatened by man's progress." However, I haven't seen anyone in the UN's purported black helicopters checking out the potential habitat for rewilding and I am outside a lot. I'm pretty sure I would have spotted them by now. On the other hand, there is plenty of other stuff that poses a direct threat to native birds like Louisiana Waterthrushes that forage on aquatic insects like caddis flies. The Bible we read when I was a kid showed our creator as an older white male with a long flowing beard. As I've gotten older I realized God could just as well be one of those obscure aquatic insects in the rivers, or even a plain brown bird that bobs as it walks along the river. Think god as caddis fly, or perhaps Louisiana Waterthrush, and not too forgiving of our pollution and not too happy about being labeled "obscure."

HUMMERS R US June 12



HUMMERS RETURN TO MT MAGAZINE SP JUNE 21-22. Bob Sargent of Hummer/Bird Study Group -- AKA, Hummers R US -- and the hard working team of Martha Sargent and Tana Beasley, will be trapping and banding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at Mt Magazine State Park Visitor's Center on Friday-Saturday, June 21-22. Sargent is author of the book Ruby-throated Hummingbird (Stackpole) and various scientific papers. Last year, hundreds of people, young and old, streamed in and out like a county fair. Attired in magnifying headgear, Bob presided in a comfortable and informal manner, while formally and systematically collecting weights, lengths, nesting status of each bird. Martha handled data sheets and Tana kept bringing in newly trapped birds. Most of us couldn't stay in our chairs and wound up crowding around three grams of emerald green fluff. With a hummer in hand, Bob explains "In this tiny brain half the size of a BB is all the information needed to build a nest and feed young hummers. That brain holds all the information concerning the habits of her successful ancestors . . . We get busy in our lives and don't notice what's going on around us," he continues. "It's a miracle, if we just take time to watch." That's Bob philosophizing. So here's a good chance for miracles, and coming to a place near us.



The solar dryer in my backyard is up and running; that is, the sun is out, wash on the line. While hanging clothes I noticed my pawpaws are covered with the small fruit of what, this fall, will be fragrant, delicious “Arkansas bananas,” AKA, pawpaws. Soon enough will come time for “Pickin’ up a pawpaw and puttin’ it in your pocket.” Hopefully, IF I can beat raccoons, opossums, and as I discovered once at Lake Atalanta, chipmunks. I was about to eat one at Lake Atalanta when Joan Reynolds noticed a chipmunk on the same branch, headed like my hand for a big, fragrant, jest-right Arkansas banana. My own pawpaw grove is a half block off busy College Avenue. I know, I know, what is pawpaw grove would serve more rationally as real estate office, liquor store parking lot, or mini Walmart. But 10 years ago my artist friend Richard Stauffacher gave me pawpaw seedlings raised on his fruit empire. There was a shady corner in my yard, near a little creek run not yet fully buried under the Asphalt of Progress. So that’s where the pawpaw seedlings went, just little things, next to the solar dryer. Passage of 10 years, and VOILA! Spread over half my solar dryer, pawpaws are threatening conquest of the known world. Gorgeous clusters of hanging crimson flowers in April, visible fruits in June, fruits by mid-September. That’s the news from PPNN.

A FATHER'S DAY REFLECTION June 17



Looking back over 67 years, my existence is blessed with great fortune. I have living bonds with people I have known more than 40 years. My opportunities for love, education, travel, friendship, and work have been generous. And despite some breaking down natural with age, on a given day I still get up and go see what the world has to offer. On this day I am remembering the young woman in this photograph, Ariel Kate, who came into my life relatively late, when I was almost 40, when I thought I already knew quite a bit. I am thankful for her and for her mother, who had faith I could be a father.

IT'S HIS WORLD, TOO June 18



I was on I-540 this morning, 29 miles from Fayetteville to Bentonville. All cars and trucks; I felt sorry for the concrete (just kidding). My mission included birds along trails at Compton Gardens and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville. I met up with this three-toed box turtle on the Dogwood Trail. We were each minding our own business. I was watching a male and female Summer Tanager. He was eating a freshly-caught worm. Part is visible in his mouth, the rest on the ground by his foot. Close up, through my spotting scope, he's color and pattern, and judging from that leaf on his neck, just out of the garden.

HUMMINGBIRD CLEARWING MOTH NEAR HOBBS STATE PARK-CA

June 20



This is a HUMMINGBIRD CLEARWING MOTH. Joan Reynolds and I watched it pollinating Common Milkweeds along highway 12 east of Rogers and near Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area on June 19. As you can see from this image, this insect is well named. You can see right through the unscaled parts of the wing. They function like a window, with the big green mass of Common Milkweed showing through. Highway 12 is really wild with prairie wildflowers now. For safety reasons, the highway department has mowed a relatively narrow strip along each side of the road, but the wide shoulder areas have been left for native flowers and pollinators, like this clearwing. There was a safe pull-off onto Key Road in case you head out that way.

REGAL FRITILLARY AT PRAIRIE STATE PARK June 26



THIS REGAL FRITILLARY was at Prairie State Park near Joplin, Missouri, last Saturday, June 22. It is perching on orange milkweed. Regals are strongly associated with the flowers of native prairies. Lori Spencer, author of *Arkansas Butterflies and Moths*, says they apparently disappeared from Arkansas by the 1970s. For me this is a pretty striking example of what happens due to habitat loss. For every one of these very obvious losses, you know there must be many more lost that are not so striking in appearance. It is our challenge: to combine our modern lives with active, intelligent stewardship of air, land, and water.

ROSEATE SPOONBILLS AND WOOD STORKS June 28



On Friday evening July 12, I'm presenting "Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, and other special avian visitors in the Mississippi valley of southeastern Arkansas." The evening starts at 7 PM at Nightbird Books, 205 West Dickson Street in Fayetteville. Included: lots of birds plus relevant local history. Free and open to the public. At Nightbird you can purchase your beverage of choice, including wine and beer, plus snacks like cheesecake. (You'll never have spoonbills so comfortable.) If more food adds to the evening, an excellent food truck lives in the Nightbird parking lot. Lisa Sharp has also been running a summer sale, so buy books at attractive prices. We appreciate Lisa and her staff for permitting us to hold this event in such a comfortable space. The event is sponsored by Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society.

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE NEAR MAYSVILLE June 30



I photographed this LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE in Benton County east of Maysville today. They used to be common in Fayetteville, but that was 40 years ago. The population reduction is continent wide, not just here. Shrikes are one of the few species to have declined throughout much of its range. Most of this is an old story, often repeated: it probably has to do with how we are changing the landscape. The question for me is: if shrikes evolved and once thrived in this landscape, is the fact that that landscape is less and less suitable for them a warning to us? I would think so and not just because I'm a bird watcher and enjoy shrikes. I think there are messages in this worthy of consideration.

ZOOMED IN ON THE SHRIKE'S EYE July 2



This continues my thoughts from Sunday. Same bird, the shrike from Maysville, but I have zoomed it up to the eye. I have been looking at shrikes for 30 years, and I'd never realized the brown iris. Previously, it always looked just black, rather featureless, blending into the black mask. I wonder about other realities, supposedly fast and true. Zoomed up, at least metaphorically, unexpected details emerge, like the insect universe on a single blooming wild hydrangea.

BUSY WILD HYDRANGEA July 2



So what's going on with a single blooming wild hydrangea? I've been seeing them in cool moist places when I'm out birding. Some of the bigger wild hydrangeas have vast populations of pollinating insects. Here's one I photographed along Mill Creek in Madison County yesterday.

DR NEIL NODELMAN AT CHESNEY PRAIRIE NATURAL AREA July 13



THIS IS MY BIRDING FRIEND, DR NEIL NODELMAN. Workdays he is a professional chemist, bird days he comes well-equipped. Note trousers tucked in socks (tick readiness), bins (bird readiness), books tucked under his belt (ecological readiness -- butterflies, wildflowers) and smile (fun readiness). This was at the start of a Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society field trip to Chesney Prairie Natural Area at Siloam Springs on July 6. Flowers and birds are plentiful at Chesney now. Joe Woolbright provided 3 miles of mowed paths that permit exploration of the whole place. This is an especially good time to visit because the flowers and pollinators are at a maximum.

FIELD TRIP TO CHESNEY PRAIRIE NATURAL AREA July 13



Here's part of Chesney Prairie Natural Area during the Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society field trip on July 6, looking west. The mowed trails make it easy to move through the dense, species rich prairie vegetation. Baker Prairie Natural Area at Harrison also has mowed trails. You can haul a stool or something and just sit and take in the whole amazing show. Big hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, and water are a good idea, too, if you visit.

A WHEEL BUG IN GENTRY PRAIRIE July 18



This WHEEL BUG was perched on a blazing star at Gentry Prairie in Benton County this morning. Tall purple wands of blazing stars are in a glorious peak and the insects in the big blazing patches are extraordinary. I typically visit because of my interest in grassland birds (example: meadowlarks, dickcissels), but once I make the “mistake” of looking at flowers, there’s no escaping the awesome diversity of native insects. Gentry Prairie is an 8-acre scrap of what a century ago was approximately 10 square miles of the Round Prairie. This little prairie, and its insects, are subjects of efforts to purchase and protect, or failing that, fated to disappear under development. Look up Gentry Prairie on facebook.

ABOUT ASHY SUNFLOWERS IN LATE JULY July 21



In our little corner of this vastness, smiling yellow ranks of ashy sunflowers draw out the essential open country of bumblebees, butterflies, wind, and sky. And bobwhites, too. While I know he sings for his own reasons, there's no denying he also serenades these sunflowers. BOBWHITE! says he. BOBWHITE! comes an answer. Caught by the breeze, ashy sunflowers say AMEN, and so do we.

NESTLING BROAD-WINGED HAWKS AT CAULK'S July 23



These are NESTLING BROAD-WINGED HAWKS, yesterday, in a nest on forested Mount Sequoyah right in the middle of Fayetteville. At Sara and Bob Caulk's and comfortably visible from their back deck. One of the pleasures of birding in extensively forested places like Buffalo National River and Ozark National Forest, is a BRIEF look at a soaring Broad-winged Hawk. So this is a fine surprise, less than a mile from my own house. They couldn't have chosen a better yard, either. Bob and Sara are consistently active in conservation, especially the Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association and Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society.

SNOWY EGRETS August 6



SNOWY EGRETS, like other herons and egrets, faced possible extinction a century ago because they were being killed for their feathers. People rose up, founded Audubon societies, and eventually got state and federal laws passed that protected all native birds. Nobody is collecting them for feathers today, at least not here, but there are other challenges, to other species, and we can help them too, just like egrets of a century ago. I saw this Snowy today, in the valley of the Arkansas River.

ALERT FOR POISONOUS PEOPLE August 9



Be alert for poisonous people! I wanted to see a PRAIRIE KINGSNAKE, but I wanted a live one. This morning not long before I saw it, a driver swerved on highway 12, well off the roadway and onto the shoulder, purposefully and recklessly, to hit this snake. Do you suppose the driver considered this a civic duty? To swerve onto the shoulder and risk an accident on a busy highway to kill a snake? Probably. Prairie Kingsnakes are non-poisonous, but not such drivers, and not the culture that breeds them and their ignorant, heartless behavior. Somewhere their spirits have been poisoned. This big snake had lived probably 20 or more years in grasslands near Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport.

AFTER IT STOPPED RAINING TODAY August 12



After it stopped raining today, this HUMMINGBIRD CLEARWING MOTH got right to work on swamp milkweeds growing along Clabber Creek Trail in west Fayetteville. Since I was soaked anyway, I got down by the creek and took a photo of a cardinal flower, too.

BEHOLD SWAMP MILKWEED August 12



Behold SWAMP MILKWEED, now in glorious flower, in a few swampy places around northwest Arkansas. Exotic as a flock of Roseate Spoonbills, masses of crimson pink, surely among the most striking of plants. We don't find Roseate Spoonbills this far north, but we do have these swamp milkweeds, petals brilliant like bird feathers. And as the day warms and flowers open, they swarm with bumblebees and butterflies. In their presence, can we doubt the wisdom of our universe? These are blooming in the spring run of an old prairie at the state fish hatchery in Centerton. Usually I go to the hatchery for birding, but as I've gotten to know these swamp milkweeds, I find myself going there for them, too.

ASHY SUNFLOWER AND FLOWER SPIDER August 18



ASHY SUNFLOWER AND FLOWER SPIDER (a type of crab spider) from Regal Prairie at Prairie State Park, north of Joplin, Missouri, yesterday. We are inundated by fears our country and planet are going to hell in a hand basket. People get relief in various ways. For some it's politics, quilting, or running; for me, yippee, birding. I don't say this to neglect social realities or undermine legitimate stress under which we, and our planet, lives. Problems, personal and universal, are undeniable. Taking one flower at a time makes it possible to keep general chaos in scale. There too is a war out here with a 24-hour news cycle, but not attended with a bunch of confusing mayhem and scandal. Yesterday, in an ashy sunflower landscape populated by millions, extending upwards into cloudy heavens, it was one flower hoping for pollination and seed; one spider, hoping for a careless beetle or bumblebee.

UNEXPECTED TIGER MOTH August 21



On this brilliant butterfly milkweed is the larval form of the UNEXPECTED TIGER MOTH; scientific name *Cynia inopinatus*. We stopped to admire the gorgeous flowers and saw the Unexpected Tiger Moth caterpillar. Who would expect so elegant a plant attended by a caterpillar with body color same as orange flowers and gray hairs a match for hairs on the stalk and irregular blotches on the petals? And furthermore, a moth considered uncommon and even rare throughout much of its range? Like other grassland species – take Greater Prairie-Chickens for example – this moth is imperiled by widespread loss of quality habitat. I wonder about the other secrets out there? I share the view that we conserve such creatures and their required habitat, not from altruistic nobility, and not because we are trying to block society's material progress, but because every one of these creatures hold secrets that may be vital to our own futures. The age-long dance between milkweed and grasslands may have fostered evolution of say, rare elixirs new to science and helpful to us. Make that doubly so in the case of creatures like this one, about which so little is known. This milkweed is widespread in Arkansas; what about these moths? Two plants were blooming along the main road at Prairie State Park in Missouri last Saturday August 17. Each plant had its *Cynia inopinatus* caterpillars.

THE GREEN BIRD IN AUGUST August 19



August is wet, cool, lush. From the bushes, catbirds call whaaa! whaaa! I hear satisfaction about fat bugs for fledglings. At Chesney Prairie Natural Area, native big bluestem prairie grass forms an arch 7-8 feet above my head. Goldfinches have the seed heads on an endless supply of ashy sunflowers, males smart and official in their formal black and gold. On a snag there's a Red-headed Woodpecker adult and a brown-headed fledgling. Out flies the adult in a modest loopy-loop, and back to youngster with a nice bug. I can't see a grin on anyone's face, but you know it's gotta be good when someone brings you food. This August I'm tramping down unexpectedly wet bottoms, lured by brilliant cardinal flowers and masses of flowering swamp milkweed attended by extraordinary, banded caterpillars black, yellow, and white, plying among blooms like Roseate Spoonbills. In its lushness and extravagance, life sends a text. These monarchs emerge from the chrysalis ready for famous migration. They carry the word south, vivid in orange and black. What we call borders are no barriers in the broad intentions of life. We have been seeing small flocks of Indigo Buntings, though most now are brown. But here's a green one, a Painted Bunting in the tall grass. Nothing but good can come from spotting a green bird in August.

PASSENGER PIGEON – GONE; RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER – SAVED

August 22



This adult female RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER has a granddaddy longlegs or some other bug in her bill. She's perched at the entrance to a nest cavity; inside are recently hatched young woodpeckers ready for a meal. If we were out there in the woods, we could hear their constant churring and begging. She's perched on a mature shortleaf pine tree in the Ouachita National Forest near Waldron, Arkansas. This nest is good news: Red-cockadedes are an endangered species. The nesting cavity is artificial. It was installed by Forest Service personnel as a way to encourage nesting. Notice her leg bands? Adult Red-cockadedes like her were trapped and moved to the Ouachita NF because there is a lot of good habitat. This is public land, where the population can grow. There is a lot of discomfoting news about our environment, but in fact all the news isn't bad. We are slowly learning. Some of this is being applied to bring Red-cockadedes back. I took this picture in May 2006. I dug it out because on Saturday, August 31, at 2 PM, I'm presenting a program about this at Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area visitor's center. The program is free and open to the public.

TODAY, MILKWEEDS AND MONARCHS August 26

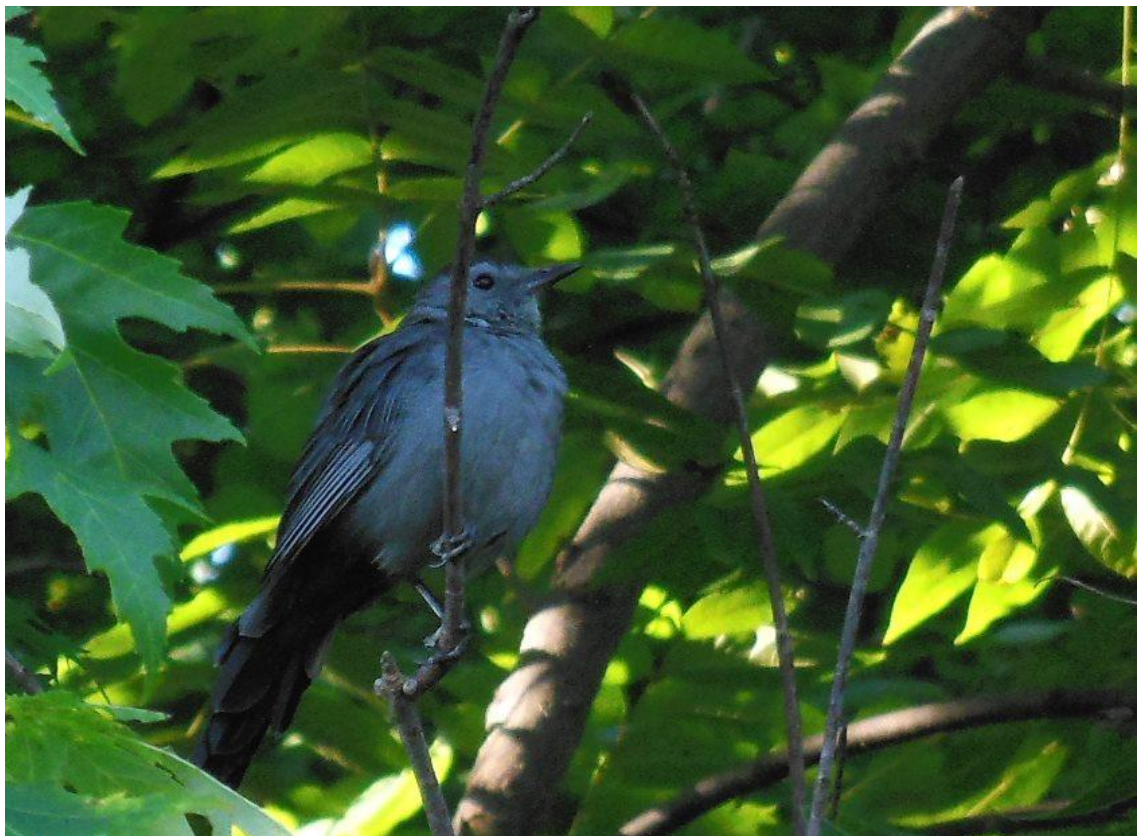


When she was leaving Fayetteville yesterday, and while lifting off from 40 MPH to freeway warp speed, Joan Reynolds spotted pink swamp milkweed flowers right along I-540. She felt pretty sure, but not 100%. I went out there this morning for ground truthing. I am proud to report 200 milkweeds, celestial pink, with full employment for neighborhood bumblebees. Also, fantastic monarch caterpillars, with what I assume are tickets to blue October skies and a leisurely flight to Mexico for the winter. Some goldenrod is already yellow, and more to come. The field is adjacent existing office development. Milkweeds own perhaps $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre. With the economy up, there's little reason to think they can retain title. Two FOR SALE signs rise among flowers. One side of me jumps up and down proclaiming, soothsayer-like, "Take heed my fellow travelers on Spaceship Earth." Another side counsels, "One day at a time." Today, milkweeds and monarchs.

LOCAL BIRDS, DUSK AND DAWN August 28



At 6:30 PM, dusk in the middle of urban Fayetteville, 4 Mississippi Kites soaring over noise of going home traffic on College Avenue and in full light of evening sky. This morning, 6:20 AM, another day's opening: an Eastern Screech-Owl singing, whinny so horse-like and blending with back up alarm of a recycling truck, collecting in the cool ahead of promised heat. At first light, waaa waaa waaas of catbirds, unseen, in bushes, collecting first morning light.



BLUE CARDINAL FLOWER IN THE DITCH August 29



Flowing curled shapes pointing up, pointing out, delicate hairs, throat stripes dark and light blue; emergent artesian spring-like from greens thin and broad, against background of curving stripes green, dark, and light. Pointing up, hint of reflected light . . . down in a ditch, just beyond reach of mower and weed whacker and generally, close perception . . . From the world in which we live: hidden, unexpected, of no value in the market. Absent from the news cycle. Jets fly over, automobiles and trucks fly by. Little children do not study it in school. Busy world, preoccupied, mostly misses it, and so usually do I. Friend of sedges, minnows, and small frogs, beautifier of roadside ditches, nurturer of pawpaw groves, noticer of passing waterthrushes, cultivator of wet shady places in the mind, perennial champion of wildflower pageants. Blue cardinal flower, *Lobelia siphilitica*, also called great lobelia, blue lobelia. In the ditch at Craig State Fish Hatchery, Centerton August 27, 2013.

SUNFLOWER CITY August 30



Sunflowers recapitulate the universe. Honoring fundamentals, they spiral from the center, rays extended, primordial energy released, advertisements for pollinating bees. Come visit me, come visit me, they say. Now at the end of August, ashy sunflowers burn through their rays, provide to goldfinches sun-dried, ripened, seeds: an essence, what feeds nestling birds, what recreates the universe. Dickcissels out in the middle of the field, in high flowers. A female carries a cricket in her bill down into the grass, and back. She perches on a sunflower and calls WHIT! WHIT! and looks back to young birds I hear, but can't see. It has in some respects taken 14 billion years to get here, but happily only a few months to make today's sunflowers, and free for admiring, too. Directly to you from Chesney Prairie Natural Area, AKA, Sunflower City, August 30, 2013.

THIS ROUGH GREEN SNAKE September 1



THIS ROUGH GREEN SNAKE is gliding through green bushes today at Lake Atalanta in Rogers. Notice how it starts, not with snake, but with big eye. That's snake, not grass, not bushes. Its big eye is on my big eye. What does this mean? I sense myself leaving 2013, returning to 1955. Our family has come to swim at the Natural Dam on Mountain Fork Creek. We buy a dark green watermelon out of the back of a pickup. As was then the habit, we let it float in the water, like us, cooling off. It drifts to the bank, in the shade of bushes. It's there, as a redneck kid, Southern Baptist and all, I spot my first green snake, investigating our watermelon, slender light green on rotund dark green, in the shade. It comes up again today, more than a half century later. I want Atalanta's visitors in 2055 to spot a green snake in the bushes. I want a future ignorant redneck kid like me to spot a green snake on a floating watermelon. This is not primarily about laws, politics, or who is right. We get this one chance to focus. HOORAY FOR THAT WORLD WHERE THERE IS ROOM FOR GREEN SNAKES! Too soon it glides past, returning to the intertwine of snakes, bushes, and memory.

LIKE A FLAMING COMET September 9



It must have been many thousands of years ago, long before us, when flowers and birds made an arrangement of mutual benefit. Evidence is in green thickets of jewelweed scattered in cool shadows of a flowing Ozark spring. Water droplets like diamonds shimmer on the leaves. Heavenly red-orange trumpets dangle star-like in this firmament. Suddenly, a tiny creature of emerald green and dark eye appears like a flaming comet among flowers. Hovering there, wings as shadows, it examines the universe of jewelweed and spring, and probes the trumpet. Translation: Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are approaching a zenith in their migration through the Ozarks. Frisco Spring, Lake Atalanta, Rogers, AR, September 9, 2013.

GOLDFINCHES AND SUNFLOWERS AT CHESNEY PRAIRIE NATURAL AREA

September 9



FLOCKS OF AMERICAN GOLDFINCHES ARE BUSY AT CHESNEY PRAIRIE NATURAL AREA. Chip-chip-chip they call and overhead with a dip they fly. I have never seen such growth of big bluestem, Indian grass, little bluestem, switchgrass. Never has there been a better season for them. It's the prairie millennia, native grasses and flowers at maximum, as nature intended. Goldfinches have learned, come late summer-early fall, the Welcome Mat is out, seed-wise, in big fields of sunflowers. Our goldfinches have done their homework. They are sure busy in the ashy sunflower patches. I start walking toward them, get in about 10 steps when the sunflowers explode in a volcano of finches. I'm walking toward what I think is 1 or 2 goldfinches, then 50 burst out of sunflowers and grasses. How many nutritious ashy sunflower seeds can there be on thousands of plants? Feeding how many goldfinches? Feeding our overly commoditized spirits?

IT'S TIME TO GET OUT AND ENJOY DICKCISSELS September 10



IT'S TIME TO GET OUT AND ENJOY DICKCISSELS! This female Dickcissel has a green hopper in her bill and she's perched in a giant ragweed. From her plumage it appears she hatched this year. The photograph is from Chesney Prairie Natural Area near Siloam Springs, yesterday. Dickcissels were numerous mainly because of southward migration. They do nest in big fields around northwest Arkansas, but now we also have migrants passing through from the north. Most of this will be over by late September as these migrants will have moved through. Thereafter, we will find only the scattered bird or two until the arrival of winter. At that time most Dickcissels will be on their wintering grounds in northern South America.

BISON, BIRDS & BOTANY September 11



The plant in this picture is *Eryngium leavenworthii*. It is expected to be a headliner for the botany section of the non-event Bison, Birds, and Botany (BBB) Friday and Saturday, September 20 and 21, at The Nature Conservancy's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeastern OK. I took the picture around this time last year, so . . . Anyone interested is invited. The annual Harley conflagration Bikes, Blues, and Barbecue will occur in Fayetteville on those dates. Predictions are that the Harley version of BBB will draw the larger crowd. I'm carpooling over there from Fayetteville with Mary Bess Mulhollan. Several folks have contacted me, so I assume we'll have a small group including birders, native plant enthusiasts, and bison photographers. On Friday and again on Saturday, we will have a meet up at noon at TNC's headquarters on the preserve, then head out for adventure. If interested, noon meetings on Friday and Saturday will be the best way to link up. Several of us will also be staying at the Super 8 motel in Bartlesville on Friday and Saturday night, so finding us there will be another way to link up (if necessary, you can try me in the evening at 479 935 5170). In terms of what we are going to be doing, "Look at everything and follow what's interesting." It will be mainly drive, stop, look, with modest amount of optional walking. No cross country hikes. No riding bison. There is no charge for this event, though if you want to donate \$1 million to TNC, I assume they will consider.

GOOD BIRDS RIGHT AHEAD September 17



MIKE MLODINOW is standing in front of the Lake Atalanta entrance sign, pointing and grinning. "Good birds right ahead" he seems to say. We were soon joined by Joan Reynolds and encountered David Oakley who'd come to photograph the wild plant Indian Pipe, blooming in the leaf mold below some pawpaw trees. A few hours of birding in the Frisco Spring hollow produced our best sightings for fall landbird migration to date. WARBLERS: Tennessee Warbler (1), Nashville Warbler (3), Northern Parula (6-7), Chestnut-sided (1), Black-and-white (3-4), American Redstart (1), waterthrush species (1), Kentucky Warbler (1), Common Yellowthroat (1), Wilson's Warbler (4-5), and Canada Warbler (1). VIREOS: White-eyed (6-7), Yellow-throated (1), and Warbling (1). We ran into quite a few EMPIDONAX flycatchers, including Leasts (2-3) and Acadian (1) working a plentiful supply of small black flies. Also, Rose-breasted Grosbeak (1-2) and Broad-winged Hawk (2). American Goldfinches (3) were down along a shallow spring run with lots of algae. At one point we had two yellow Summer Tanagers in view, framed by flowering blue lobelias: one splashing in shady shallows between two big sycamore leaves while the other perch over it, observing from a thick grape vine. American Robins and Brown Thrashers were foraging in dense layers of black ripe possum grapes. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (10) continue in jewelweed patches along the spring.

FILLING IN THE BLANKS September 18



JOAN REYNOLDS AND MIKE MLODINOW are filling in the blanks about Lake Atalanta in Rogers. We were birding and botanizing there yesterday. A few hours with them sheds valuable light on natural history of the Ozarks in northwest Arkansas. Both visit LA as volunteers. They find the springs, glades, lake, and other habitats fascinating. Joan, a Rogers resident, has long been an officer in Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society and a birder. She combines that with expertise in botany. She studied under botanist Burnetta Hinterthuer at Northwest Arkansas Community College. Mike who lives in Fayetteville has been birding at LA for three decades; during this time he has maintained detailed lists of birds and their abundance. The eBird database for Arkansas and the bird records database maintained by Arkansas Audubon Society are enriched by his observations. Joan has been conducting an inventory of LA's native plants and is assisting others, notably botanist Theo Witsell of Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, in further surveys associated with the park's future. She is also a volunteer in the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks native wildflower garden. Dedicated studies of plants and birds in one place provide us a data-rich background for assessing ecological values. LA, for example, contains an impressive inventory of native plants found either nowhere else in Arkansas or in few other places. Bird data, like that from yesterday's field trip, fills in blanks about how this one park supports bird migration through our region of North America. In this photograph, Joan and Mike are standing in front of a pawpaw thicket along Frisco Springs in LA.

WOOOO. PIG. SOOIE! FOR PINNACLE PRAIRIE September 19



Aubrey Shepherd gives blood at the office. His shins are bloody from blackberry thickets and sharp-edged cordgrass leaves encountered while wandering Pinnacle Prairie (PP) in south Fayetteville. It's all in a day's work for this Vietnam vet and civic activist. Pinnacle Foods, Inc. is so close to the University of Arkansas you can hear Razorback fans callin' them hogs. I'm all WOOed myself, even if I did get a few chiggers. In one respect, PP could be dismissed as low waste ground tucked behind an industrial plant along a spur of the old Frisco Railroad. But just smell that baking garlic bread while standing under a natural canopy of Big Bluestem Grass with splayed out turkey foot seed heads, harvest orange-yellow plumes of Indian Grass, and the Little Bluestem Grass with sun-driven silver parachutes of seed. Up in the corner is an old prairie blackjack oak close to Arkansas's biggest. I don't know if in its acornship it saw bison, but it knew early settlers. Fayetteville is mostly built on a former prairie, now 99.9 percent gone. Here is what existed prior to 1830 and exists still on PP: sensitive plants like rattlesnake master and impressive purple spreads of rough blazing stars. Delicate heavenly blue asters and blushing pink trumpets of false foxglove. Goldenrods are in bloom, their sunny expanses full of pollinating insects, including striking black and yellow soldier beetles. Like a space capsule, they have a message for us, special delivery from the stars. Woooo. Pig. Sooie! for Pinnacle Prairie, indeed.



Shaggy bison all but disappear in spectacular wildflower yellows, tall Big Bluestem and Indian Grass on the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northeast Oklahoma. But a couple of bulls with impressive heads and horns are in full rumble, clearly tending to business. Massive as locomotives, they face off, pawing, head-pushing, with deep growls. Then CRACK! they butt horns. One turns away, the other slowly follows. We style our prairie weekend of September 20-22 Bison, Birds, and Botany (BBB). We have 40,000 acres of Flinthills prairies and crosstimbers woodlands of northeastern Oklahoma mostly to ourselves. It's a few of us from northwest Arkansas, 3000 bison, Eastern Meadowlarks, and a spectacular display of goldenrods and prairie broomweed. Our bunch has also come for *Eryngium leavenworthii*, a rich purple wildflower of prickly-leaved swords, flowering heads spiny like miniature pineapples. They thrive midst harsh brilliant sun, prairie winds, thin soils. Too many rocks? No problem. Fat, golden pollen-covered bumblebees walk purple pineapples, buzzing at their labors. I ask botanist Burnetta Hinterthuer, "Could *Eryngium* be a suitable emblem for this place?" She thinks yes.

ERYNGIUM HITS HOME RUNS September 23



I WAS SAVED AT AGE 7 at Grand Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Smith. Mickey Mantle was my hero, his slugging my world. I wore a Little League uniform with pride. Later, our family lived on Cold Harbor battlefield in Virginia. In my naiveté, I fantasized the glories of the Civil War; mom sewed me a Confederate uniform. When I started college, my folks wanted me to become an army officer. Vietnam finished that; senseless orgasmic violence undermined the faith. I think about my personal story while looking at this spectacular flower at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, *Eryngium leavenworthii*. I remember in my late 20s when something like *Eryngium* comforted me in a common sense way. I have felt faith return over the past 40 years while watching birds, absorbing landscapes above the Buffalo, marveling at strange pawpaw flowers. At age 7, I could not appreciate the world that connects *Eryngium* to a black-and-yellow lichen moth and soldier beetle, not to mention the wider universe connecting all out there among stars. Maybe that early faith was to get me here, looking at these creatures, gifted and fascinating, like Mickey Mantle of my youth. Yes, with its sharp blades, *Eryngium* hits home runs.

LANDSCAPES OF SEED-CREATORS September 24



This is the season for grass seeds, especially some of my favorites like Big Bluestem Grass and Indian Grass. I have been out trying to photograph them. Results are generally disappointing: too bright, too windy, too . . . well, too what? I have trouble getting this idea into focus. An Indigo Bunting molted to brown suddenly appears and I forget I even have a camera. Over the years I have tried to get at seed reality in different ways. In the mid-1970s I wrote a poem: “everywhere seeds/gather and select/continuously reseeding/all shapes/passions and possibilities/some unresolved & forming.” That satisfied me for a while, but for the past decade I have dug in as an environmentalist, fighting to protect physical landscapes of seed-creators, especially remnants of former prairies, vast engines of seed-creation. It occurs to me that while I can obtain reasonable images of grasses, the problem is mainly psychological and spiritual, rather than technical. That is, my Nikon Cool-Pix does its job as advertised, but seeds don’t automatically divulge secrets. I got to thinking about this during a recent visit home by my daughter Ariel. I take her picture and am glad to have it, but what she means isn’t in the picture. A happy warrior, willing to fight for grasses, I keep going out in the fields. A proud father, I look forward to her visits. “Everywhere seeds/no material or direction missing.” Big Bluestem Grass in this picture is seeding clouds at Chesney Prairie Natural Area near Siloam Springs.



THE BUFFALO NATIONAL RIVER and the factory-scale hog farm built high in its watershed were last night's subjects of an Ozark Society meeting held at a Fayetteville church. Touted as a local operation, the farm is wholly dependent upon contracts with Cargill, the multi-national giant to food what Walmart is to retail. For this crowd, geologist John Van Brahana illustrated how water flows associated with sinkholes, caves, ledges, and highly fractured limestone conduct water. Hog waste applied on fields above will flow downstream to all. It's not rocket science; it's karst, the inconvenient truth associated with land application of animal waste. Looking around that crowded room last night, I sensed change. People spoke karst. Not only gray hairs like me, already hardened and cynical. The range included high school and college, come to church to hear the science. In the air was buzz and anger, more so than at any time since Buffalo dams were killed by public outcry. There were a hundred last night, the edge of a wave. Eventually, this will percolate down through the fractured political bedrock to Cargill and its allies in Arkansas government. Van Brahana and graduate student efforts, plus Ozark Society legal efforts, require financial support. Details at: <http://www.ozarksociety.net/>

WHITE-WINGS ALONG THE BUFFALO RIVER September 30



While birding in the upper Buffalo area this weekend as part of the Arkansas Audubon Society meeting, we encounter three guys swimming in the hole at the low water bridge. One swimmer asks, "See anything interesting?" Then, "Did you see the crow with white feathers?" He points upriver. I have included a picture: a crow with white in its flight feathers. We soon have 2-3 white-wings among a few otherwise featherly correct American Crows. Birders refer to this abnormal condition as leucism: lack of color in part of the plumage. Later, back at the Audubon meeting, midst snarky laughter, U of A professors Doug James, Ragupathy Kannan, and David Chapman, form an ad hoc Birds Records Committee. The Buffalo's white wings are Pied Currawongs, say they. This from worldly birders, much traveled, who have field-tripped to Australia. I assume most of you are, like me, not familiar with currawongs. I have a copy of Australian Birds and looked it up. You can also try Google.

AND THE CREATURE OF IMPOSSIBLY BLUE LEGS IS . . . October 5



Who is LARGE, mostly WHITE and BLACK, with stunningly BLUE legs, and long, UP CURVED bill?

Not another legislator who didn't shut the government down.

Not the long gun with the big clip that doesn't kill.

Not making more money and less sense.

Not the impregnable terminus of ig-nor-ance.

In the same area today, Blue-winged Teal (18), Green-winged Teal (1), Northern Pintail (1). Overhead, and stopping to fish, Osprey (1). Standing out in the pasture, watching ALL, Great Blue Herons (2).

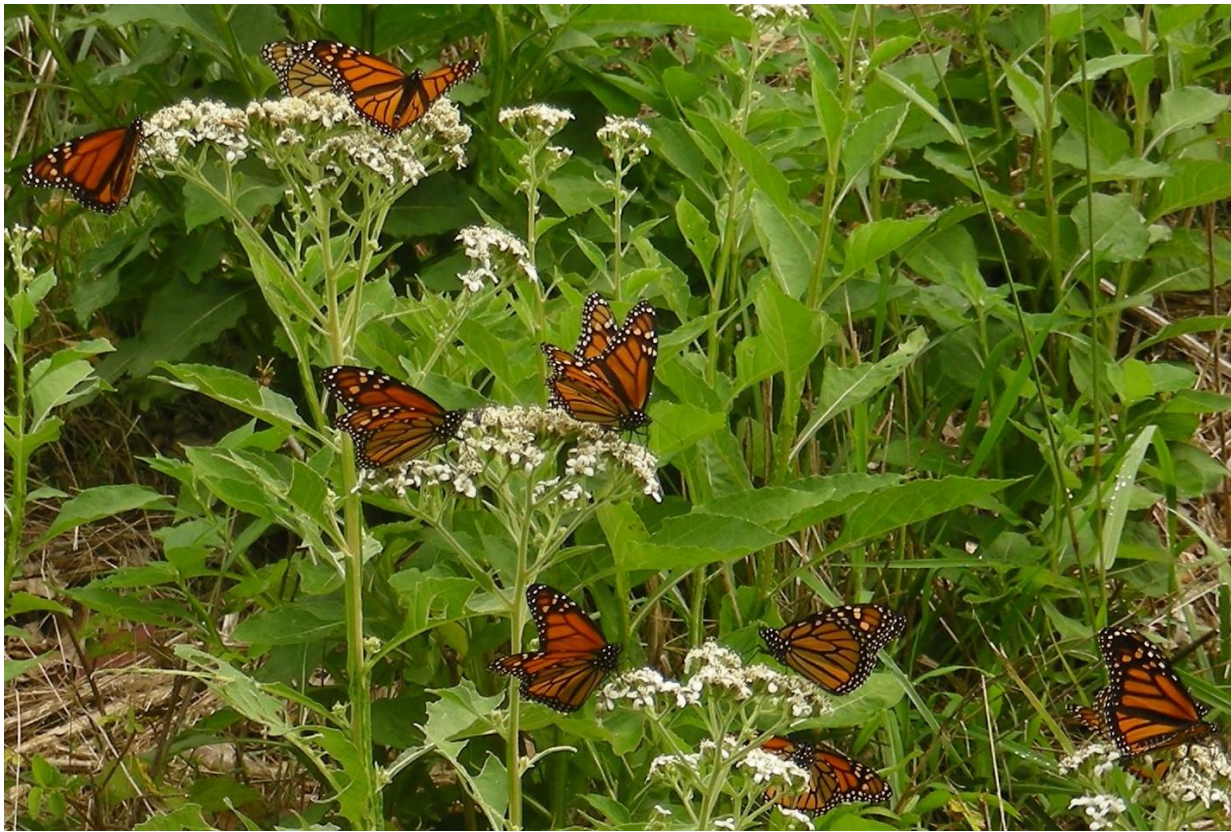
AND the creature of impossibly blue legs is . . . AMERICAN AVOCET . . . starring at Craig State Fish Hatchery, Centerton, Benton County, AR.

Today in cold rain.

Reminds us of possible.

Surprises.

WELCOME TO BLUE OCTOBER SKIES October 6



Such a day reminds me of a discouraging time years ago in graduate school. I hit the wall in one course. My personal life was a mess. I felt myself sinking. I went outside and lay down on the grass. My initial thought: I should just die here. Above, one of those cool blue skies. Luckily for me, high and low, close and far away, heaven was full of monarchs. I knew even then monarchs face infinite obstacles. Staring into the sky, I felt lifted and accepted. They flap, they sail, stop awhile to rest and refuel. Overall, they keep flying. I have hit the wall a few times since, too. I was thinking about this while viewing a roadside weed patch, composed primarily of white crownbeard, *Verbesina virginica*. It's actually a cathedral, the kind where prayers are answered. This photograph is from the north side of Beaver Lake at Lost Bridge, where monarchs had paused in migration on October 10, 2011.

HOW 'BOUT THEM BEETLES! October 10



Spaceshots & shutdowns. Super highways & mega-churches. Melting ice & rising seas. JUST ABOUT US? How can we live in a tornadic swirl and think otherwise? But then, I was out on Slate Gap Road north of Beaver Lake yesterday near Lost Bridge. Down on the lake, first fall Horned Grebes & flocks of migrating Double-crested Cormorants. Monarch butterflies sailing low under southerly breeze. Along Slate Gap, limestone outcrops with thin soils kept open under powerlines. How 'bout that hum from low-growing, not-attention-grabbing, glade-loving plants, our dainty, pink-flowered Spanish needles, *Palafoxia callosa*? It's about attending swarms of striped flies, pollen-covered bees, thread-waisted wasps, and butterflies. And limestone bluffs covered with masses of blue asters and brilliant goldenrods. Yes, that's US speeding down Slate Gap Road to the lake house, but how 'bout grebes and checkered-skipper butterflies on *Palafoxia*? How 'bout both Turkey and Black Vultures soaring in a blue sky overhead? How 'bout this fabulous coming together of life's creative energies, closely associated with goldenrods, *Megacyllene robiniae*, along Slate Gap Road yesterday, spotted by Joan Reynolds? How 'bout us, wide and diverse!

THEY CHOOSE SALAMANDERS October 15



With a pretty good fall rain coming in, RINGED SALAMANDERS were on the move here last night, back and forth from forest to breeding ponds. I was out with some UA-Fayetteville students who moved salamanders we saw off the busy highway. This is not necessarily all about 2013. In the dark and rain, consider 500 million years ago. Creatures between land and water are on the move. One direction leads to pure aquatic life, say jelly fish. Another leads to primates, say us. We're down the middle, tonight. We Homo sapiens press ever forward, without thought, at times with animus, toward creatures in the crossing. My way or the highway. Get out of the road or get run over. But . . . that's just one story . . . I sense these millions of years also lead toward deep affinities for processes that brought us here. There's that old saying, you dance with the one that brung you. The students get this. Their salamander relocation to safety looks like dancing to me, like a vote for a better future for ALL. I think that's why, of many possibilities for this particular night, they choose salamanders.

A VERY GOOD SUNFLOWER YEAR, SAY GOLDFINCHES October 17



FALL HARVEST has arrived. And not just Halloween pumpkins, hay bales, and zombies. American Goldfinches are harvesting sunflower seeds at Eagle Watch Nature Trail in Gentry. Goldfinches and sunflower seeds go together, and way way back, but we've lost most of this native habitat. Terry Stanfill, who manages Eagle Watch for SWEPCO, has been restoring tallgrass prairie habitat in one of the fields along the trail. Instead of fescue, which has no value to goldfinches, he has a variety of native prairie plants. With the onset of Fall, relevant reviews are in: a very good sunflower year, say goldfinches, by far the best judges in such matters. And you don't just get this just from deciphering their steady chip-chip-chip-chip calls. This field and its sunflowers are at least FIVE STARS, since one of the biggest goldfinch flocks I've seen this fall, 100 goldfinches or maybe more, were steadily plucking seeds in Terry's sunflower patch yesterday afternoon. Here's one from yesterday's flock.

I CELEBRATE THE PARKS October 20



I CELEBRATE THE PARKS, from the City to the Nation, for the birds and the flowers,
Where The People, drawn from all not-park, with children in swings, walks along springs,
Where hummingbirds, in their freedom, celebrate on wings.
I CELEBRATE the not-paved, money that doesn't need to be made,
War that doesn't need to be fought, power that doesn't crush a landscape.
I CELEBRATE where the dozer doesn't need to run. The not-scheduled, the not e-mailed.
All flowers and sun, all freedom of soil, passions of acorns not yet sprouted, not yet begun,
Seeds in the soil, the future ladies' tresses lilies, the trees. I celebrate weeds.
I CELEBRATE the fall birds flying away, the spirit that brings them back one day.
I CELEBRATE this Downy Gentian, *Gentiana puberulenta*, uplifted in celebration,
Below a forest of Indian grass, bug-eaten, twisted, wind-torn,
The bees that visit, Barn Swallows in sudden overpass, where bison graze, where spirit plays.
I CELEBRATE celestial parks. And with this camera I celebrate DOWNY GENTIAN,
Prairie State Park, Missouri, October 19, in the Year of Our Lord, 2013.

FROM OUT OF THE WEEDS October 22



FROM OUT OF THE WEEDS, from the white downy drift of milkweed seeds, from the yellow glumes of Indian grass . . . up pops this amazing factoid, a Savannah Sparrow; small size, big reality. Old Walt Whitman would call it one of the many leaves of grass. Amen, Walt: those patterns of streaks and swirls, those tans and browns, that reality of the dark and the light. Continental, too; they come here for winter after impressive travel. In summer they are north of us, nesting up to the edge of the Arctic, and ranging from the extremes as far west and as far east as possible and still call it North America. That big dark eye, in short, has probably seen a lot of country. Down here, for winter, even pink bill and legs blend into the living palette of our open grassy, weedy fields. This Savannah perched up for a good long look at me as I was crashing noisily through the native weeds at Woolsey Wet Prairie in the Fayetteville section of Northwest Arkansas City, today. Those long claws on its toes grip the limb like slender vines.

ANOTHER KIND OF WITCH HAZEL October 24



One kind of WITCH HAZEL, *Hamamelis vernalis*, is a tough little shrub of open, sunny gravel bars. It forms dense thickets whose intertwining root tangles bind soils and rocks. Lacking *vernalis*, our industrious hard-rushing Ozark streams like the Buffalo River quickly push gravel bars south. Come a warm, sunny day in late January, *vernalis* is blooming star of a universe otherwise more or less in winter sleep.

But Fall is here and I'm interested today in another witch hazel cousin, *Hamamelis virginiana*. In the big picture of Ozark forests, *virginiana* is deep in the holler, more or less discrete, one green shrub among greens like spicebush, hazelnut, and Carolina buckthorns. But come a sunny fall day, like yesterday, it's all star power for *virginiana*. Leaves on oaks and hickories are falling. Dogwoods are covered with clusters of red berries. Possum grapes in rich purple clusters cascade like waterfalls on their natural trellises. Leaves on *virginiana* are turning like others in the holler, but from her brown twigs burst bouquets of flowers, thin and yellow, wild curls of sunny brilliance. This photograph of *H. virginiana* is from County Road A in Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area, yesterday.

POSSUM GRAPES October 24



Possum grapes,
yum-yum.

We ate some.

Still plenty
for opossum.

FIVE SURF SCOTERS AT LAKE FAYETTEVILLE October 25



I was in full blown afternoon snooze-recline when the phone rang. It was UA-Fayetteville sophomore MITCHELL PRUITT at Lake Fayetteville. He was looking at FIVE SURF SCOTERS. So why agitate a guy in his peaceful snooze? Surf Scoters are big sea ducks and a big deal in the Arkansas birding community. We all want 'em, but we can't

have 'em here unless we get lucky. They nest in either Alaska or northern Canada. Yesterday they were part way on a southward migration. Next stop, maybe the Gulf of Mexico. Scoters here underscore (1) ecological importance of stop over habitat like Lake F; (2) need for us to defend environmental integrity of such places. I have included an up-close-and-personal Surf Scoter from spring migration (2011) and yesterday's big five. Sorry, not-up-close out in the middle of Lake F.

GALAXY OF GULLS October 27



Earth was moving today. Flock after flock of Franklin's Gulls, hundreds of them, wispy white, free, swirling and drifting south. There's nothing to do but stop, look into sky, just wonder. It's exaltation en masse. Migration carries them from where they nest on prairie marshes of Canada and the northern US, south, above us today, on and on, wild screams in the blue, to winter on the west coast of South America. Often called "sea gulls," they are prairie, like Indian grass and sawtooth sunflowers. Here they are in the sky, on the former Beaty Prairie southwest of Maysville, a place that has no doubt been witness to many such galaxies. I've also included a closer picture from spring a few years ago, when they paused briefly before heading north.



IVORY-BILLED COOTS October 29

These American Coots were at Lake Fayetteville today. Around 400-500 were visible near the Environmental Study Center dock. Their arrival over the past few weeks transitions summer to Halloween. Green ash trees have gone to



gold, others pumpkin orange, brick red, lime green. Yes, still some deep green, but also skeletons, all leaves fallen. Come from so far away, where they nested, our coots have much to



discuss, or at least that's how I interpret the bree-EEuhs, ruRRs, and bruUHs as they forage in the shallows. Now and then a coot will haul out onto a floating log for preening, steadied by those big lobed toes. Those astonishing red eyes. Those ivory-colored bills.

THE GREEN BIRD IN AUGUST

With a green bird in August, you know you can't go wrong. This speaks for itself. For example, how can you possibly go wrong when you're out with binoculars, a few friends, or a bunch from Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society and Arkansas Native Plant Society, looking for a Painted Bunting, especially a green one and in the process – say on a trip to Chesney Prairie Natural Area -- stumble on a patch of Oklahoma grass pink orchids? Or the Barbara's Buttons at Ninestone Land Trust? Or *Palafoxia callosa* blooming on limestone glade remnants above Beaver Lake? Or examining the other worldly purple flowers of pawpaws, or a timber rattler under a flowering umbrella magnolia above the Buffalo River?

82 essays and 95 photographs



Joe Neal at Beaver Lake, November 9, 2013. Photo by Joan Reynolds