

THE ZEPHYR

Monthly Bulletin of the Outdoor Nature Club of Houston, Texas.

April, 1925

Vol. 2, No. 4

Think, every morning when the sun peeps through
The dim, leaf-latticed windows of the grove,
How jubilant the happy birds renew
Their old melodious madrigals of love!
And when you think of this, remember too
'Tis always morning somewhere, and above
The awakening continents, from shore to shore
Somewhere the birds are singing evermore.

-- Longfellow.

In his proclamation calling upon all citizens of the United States to observe American Forest Week from April 27 to May 3, President Coolidge says:

"We have too freely spent the rich and magnificent gift that Nature has bestowed on us. In our eagerness to use that gift, we have stripped our forests; we have permitted fires to lay waste and devour them; we have all too often destroyed the young growth and the seeds from which new forests might spring. And though we already feel the first grip of the timber shortage, we have barely begun to save and restore.

Our children are dependent on our course. We are bound by a solemn obligation from which no evasion and no subterfuge will relieve us. Unless we fulfill our sacred responsibility to unborn generations, unless we use with gratitude and restraint the generous and kindly gifts of Divine Providence, we shall prove ourselves unworthy guardians of a heritage we hold in trust."

In accordance with a resolution adopted by the Thirty-Eighth Legislature of the State of Texas, May 1 has been designated as "Texas Bird and Wild Flower Day". In 1924, Governor Neff issued a proclamation in regard to the celebration of the day. He said:

"Remembering the fact that our native birds and wild flowers decrease as our population increases and as man selects for his home their former haunts, it is fitting that our attention be called to the necessity and propriety of preserving these beautiful manifestations of Nature's handiwork.

I hope that the parents and teachers throughout the state will give generously of their time and energy in fostering in the minds of the children of Texas a spirit of appreciation of the wild flowers with which Providence has so bountifully clothed at this season of the year the sunlit hills and broad prairies of Texas."

The summer came and all the birds were dead;
The days were like hot coals; the very ground
Was burned to ashes; in the orchards fed
Myriads of caterpillars, and around
The cultivated fields and garden beds
Hosts of devouring insects crawled, and found
No foe to check their march, till they had made
The land a desert without leaf or shade.

-- Longfellow, Birds of Killingworth.

Beneath a spreading sweetgum tree
 The bulging flivvers parked
 And all of Nature's artistry
 Shone in the sylvan scenery
 Where nature lovers larked.

So one of our enthusiastic hikers burst into verse as six automobiles loaded with members of the Club drove under the leafy canopy that shades the banks of upper Carpenters Bayou. The occasion was the third Spring outing of the Outdoor Nature Club, held on Sunday afternoon, March 22. Those who participated beheld Spring in her freshest, loveliest raiment in a spot as yet unspoiled by human activities. The date of the next excursion has not been announced by the Outing Committee, but it will be held as soon as soon as an objective has been selected for the trip.

 Of the many and varied types of living things Nature has produced in completing a universe, some of the most common creatures about our homes are among the most interesting.

Nearly everyone is familiar with the curious, little flat gray creatures that are found in damp spots under logs or flat stones. Because of their habit of rolling up in a ball when disturbed, they have become known as armadillo bugs, yet they are not really bugs at all, but crustaceans, and distant relatives of the crawfish that young people love to catch with a piece of meat tied on the end of a string.

Then there is that other curious creature that so many of us, in younger days, have caught by pushing a broom-straw down its narrow passageway in the ground and jerking when a pull indicated that something had hold of the other end. What a strange object the captive was, with a shovel and a wicked pair of pincers on its head and a curious affair, somewhat like a saddle, on its back. In other respects, it looked like a common white grub. Of course, we didn't know that this miniature dragon was the offspring of the lively tiger beetle, and we could hardly be blamed for our ignorance, as the proud parents themselves would never recognize their unlovely progeny, so different in appearance and habits.

Another strange creature of our backyards is known by the same common name as that applied to Mrs. Tiger Beetle's baby, though the two families are not closely related, and travel in different social strata. Ask a freckle-faced youngster to tell you what a "doodle-bug" is, and he will describe either the larva previously mentioned or another infant prodigy entirely different in aspect, though equally as ferocious to the ants and small "bugs" that form its bill of fare. This insect, also known as the ant-lion, fashions for itself a funnel-shaped hollow in loose sand, and with its eager jaws extended, it lies hiding at the bottom of this pit until some hapless ant, with too many business cares on its brain to watch where it is going, topples over the edge of the pit into the hungry jaws below. If the ant should temporarily escape the grasping jaws and start a vain effort to climb up the shifting sides of the trap, it is harassed by a shower of sand thrown up by the ant-lion, and finally falls to the bottom, to be dragged under the earth until its struggles cease in the grasp of the vise-like jaws.

A small collection of these ant-lions in a box of sand will furnish unusual entertainment as they industriously construct their traps, backing around in narrowing circles and throwing up sand like a company of miniature steam shovels. If luck is good for the ant-lion (and bad for the ants), it will soon disappear in what looks like a small ball of earth, from which it later emerges a gauzy-winged may-fly.

Notes and News

The Club's first set of colored lantern slides of interesting spots in Houston woodlands and of various birds, animals and wild flowers native to this section of the country, are now available to schools, churches, and any organizations desiring to use them, free of charge. Whenever possible, members of the Outdoor Nature Club will be glad to exhibit the slides, using them as illustrations for a talk on nature as seen by Houston lovers of the outdoors. For further information, call Miss Tillie Schmidt, Chairman of the Art Committee, H-6960-J, or L. H. Daingerfield, care of the U. S. Weather Bureau.

The New York State and City Federation of Women's Clubs have dedicated the week April 1 to 8 as New York's Conservation Week. There will be contests and programs on the conservation of natural resources in all the schools, and on April 3 - John Burrough's birthday - there will be speeches by Colonel Theodore Roosevelt and Congressman John D. Clarke, author of the "Clarke Forestry Bill". On Saturday, April 4, the convention will be addressed by Chas. Lathrop Pack, President of the American Tree Association, and by Dr. Wm. T. Hornaday, whose earnest and courageous work has earned for him the title of defender of the nation's heritage of wild life.

During this month, the Outdoor Nature Club celebrates its birthday. The Club's first meeting was held under the trees bordering the bait casting pond in Hermann Park, on Sunday afternoon, April 8, 1923. Ten or twelve interested persons gathered in response to a letter written by Joe Heiser, Jr., and published in the Houston Chronicle on March 21, 1923. Prof. R. A. Sell was chosen temporary chairman, and several committees were appointed to draw up plans for future action. At the second meeting, held in the offices of the Kerr floral establishment on April 10, Prof. Sell was elected president, Mrs. Robt. C. Kerr vice-president, and Miss Mabel Cassell, secretary. On the evening of April 25, the Club gave its first nature program, talks being made by Prof. Sell, Mrs. Kerr and Mr. L. H. Daingerfield. About eighteen or twenty persons were in the audience, some of whom are among the most active members of our thriving organization of today. Messrs. Schutz, Daingerfield, Pullen and Heiser composed the party taking the first long trip on foot, a hike up Brays Bayou, on Sunday afternoon, May 13. Previous to this, the first automobile outing had been held and recorded in the newspapers by the Club's official scribe, Miss Julia Beazley.

Reports are now being received from Mr. and Mrs. Martin Johnson, famous photographers of African wild life, who are to spend several years on Lake Paradise, in the midst of the African jungle, taking motion pictures of elephants, giraffes, rhinoceroses, and other wild beasts in their native haunts. The chronicles of these two wilderness loving Americans are full of adventure and romance, of obstacles doggedly overcome and success worthily attained. Their work will be handed down to posterity in photographic records of the home life of strange and wonderful creatures gradually fading into the oblivion that has swallowed up the dinosaur, the mastodon, and other monstrous creatures of by-gone days. Thousands of years after the last great African elephant and the last ungainly, gentle-eyed giraffe have disappeared from the vast, useless veldts, their myriad numbers will live again upon the screen, an endless honor to those who matched wits with the wild and won the bloodless trophies of the camera.

According to one of our observers who noted the work of sapsuckers upon the trunk of a tree, the crossword puzzle craze has overflowed the bounds of the city and reached into the mks of forest inhabitants.

Parks, Forests and Wild Life Refuges

The following paragraphs are quoted from an article by P. L. Buttrick, Secretary Connecticut Forestry Association, published in "The Guide to Nature", one of our country's pioneer nature magazines:

"A world peopled by barnyard cows, field mice and English sparrows might be a final proof of man's superiority to all creation but it would be a world scarcely worth living in. Yet such a world is approaching; it is the logical conclusion of our present way of living.

Many earnest people have long realized this, and have realized that the birds and animals and plants have a value to us that cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Even though their economic value is enormous, their aesthetic and spiritual value far outweighs it.

But this is, as the newspaper men say, all 'old stuff' to you. The question in your minds is, what can we do to prevent the almost monotonous phrase, 'formerly common, now rare', from being attached to ever increasing lists of plants and animals, and to keep down, if you will pardon the use of such a phrase, the alarming increase in the birth rate of extinct species?

..... What difference does it really make if we pass laws saying that no one shall shoot woodcock or wood duck or pick trailing arbutus, if then we give the plants and animals no place in which to live?

Assuming that the laws are enforced - difficult in itself - no legislation, no public sentiment on earth can preserve within the ranks of the living birds, animals or plants when by every act of ours we take away and destroy their living places.

It has come to the settled conviction, I think, of all students of the subject, that the best, indeed the only satisfactory way, to preserve our wild life, is to lay aside large areas where it may live and breed undisturbed.

..... All this raises the question, is it not the duty of the state to lay aside areas where wild plants and animals may live unmolested? The principle seems well established in national affairs. All our great national parks are also wild life sanctuaries. Do we not need them as much here as "out west", and who is going to give them to us if we do not set them aside for ourselves?

We need them for wild life preservation; we need them for the preservation of natural scenery; we need them for public recreation, and we need them to produce a supply of timber for the future. In some cases all these things can be accomplished on the same areas; in others they must be segregated on different areas.

..... Now cities, towns and states can purchase land suitable for parks reasonably cheaply. If we do not purchase it today, the next generation of Americans will be a race of city people - will know nothing of nature and will be poorer Americans in consequence, and most of our wild life will have vanished as the Indian and the buffalo."

Among other features worth saving, the area now being advocated for the proposed "Big Thicket" park on San Jacinto River contains a virgin forest of holly trees such as can be seen in no other locality within many miles of Houston, and in few places in the entire United States. Twenty-five years from now (how quickly the time will pass!) a single undamaged holly tree will be unusual. But a whole forest of holly trees, shining and symmetrical - that will be a gloriously rare and beautiful sight! Thousands of people will come from distant points to view this treasure of the woodland, and its value to our city and state will increase with each passing year.