

A Song for the Asking
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and

EarthSong Photography Workshops: Walking in Beauty

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Hello to All:

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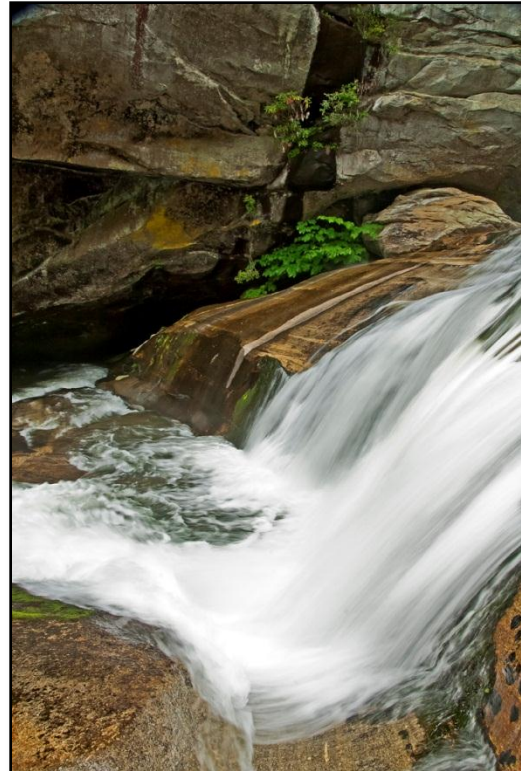
The Fishes, the Dreamers, and Me

There is a line in one of my favorite children's stories which seems appropriate as a starting point: "... there is no beginning and no end to the sea." ***Scuffy the Tugboat***, **Gertrude Crampton's** classic allegory on what makes for enough, was written the year before I was born; and by the time I was three or four, my mother and I had read it so often the covers were already nearly worn off. Three years ago I gave it, dog-ears and all, to my grandson **Rich Padgett**, whose love of the written word marked him, long before his recent seventh birthday, as a beautiful mind.

For there is no beginning and no end to the sea: More than half a century I have thought about those words, fretted over them with the same intensity as with few others, "God is love" for instance. And though they remain enigmatic, there are moments of clarity when it seems as if I can tease from them bits of understanding and insight.

A vocabulary, as **Ernest Callenbach**

reminded us, implies a story of how the world works and why; and a sea with neither beginning, nor ending, was as obscure to me as night on the farms of my grandparents in the early 1950s; there were no words to touch it. In later years I would learn about such amazing aspects of our planet as the water cycle, and a light would suddenly shine. Of course there is no beginning and no end to the sea because it's all the same water



A Bird on the Rock

everywhere. The water, that element so essential to all life, is indivisible. The same wetness that flows so beautifully over Bird Rock Falls in the roaring drainage of the French Broad River's North Fork may one day roll on into the Gulf of Mexico below the



Crescent City of New Orleans. Or it may evaporate somewhere around St. Louis to become part of a cloudscape over the Midwest that will empty its accumulated self on a growing field of Illinois corn. There are seeps high up on the shoulder of Silvermine Bald at 5,980', whose waters I still trust well enough to sip. If they go undrawn they will thread downward into Kiese Creek and join with Courthouse Creek further on to become part of a river

Water without End

system that ultimately flows across a vast section of this country, draining portions of a dozen states. North Fork is a true first link in that system. The point is that it's all identical, really; each molecule connected to every other like strands of a web, and to touch it anywhere is to feel it everywhere, like a thin mesh net stretched easily and thoughtfully around the fabric of the world.

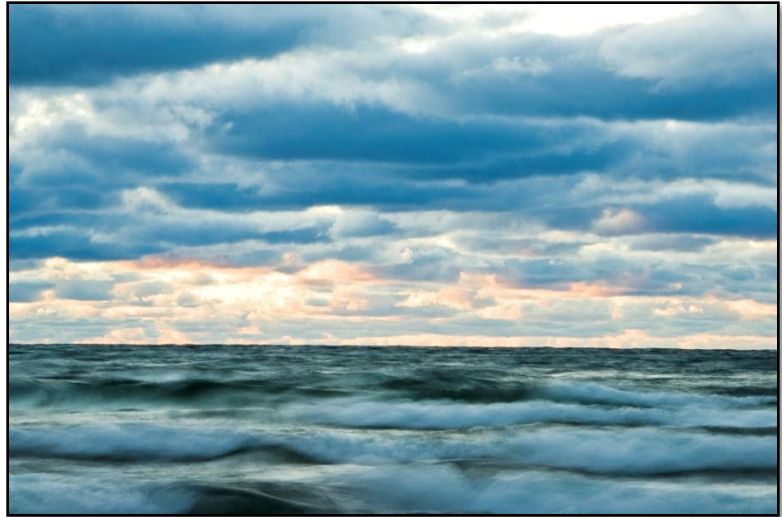
Then there's the role that you and I have in this. The water that I might withdraw from that Silvermine Bald seep I mentioned passes through a membrane somewhere in my stomach, or intestinal tract, and becomes a part of me, indistinguishable from the vessels and tissues and bones that are organized around this energy system named Don. I am thus implicated in the process. I am a part of the greater whole; the water and I –



And the Sea Rolled On

and some other stuff – are in it together until death us do part. And, just perhaps, it's more than coincidental that the water in my body and the water in the never-ending sea are both saline by an amount that suggests some ancient form of commonality. Again, the point to be stressed is that of connection, since by a very easy and direct extension, the "other stuff" includes everything, the entirety of the material realm. It's all of a piece: bone, tissue, rock, dirt, root, flower, fruit; "all" means every bit of it: that which is interior to me, that which is exterior to me, and that which is somewhere in between. And what I do to the rest of everything, I do to myself. Further thoughts on vocabulary:

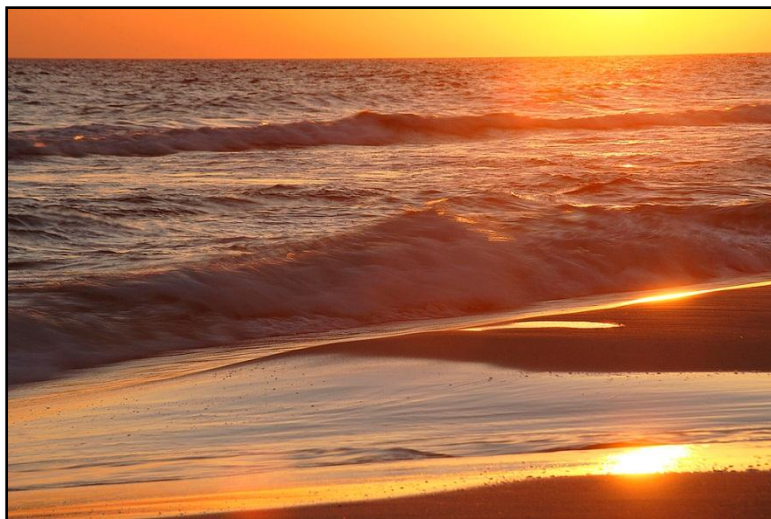
“all” and “no” are very similar words; what part of “all” do we not understand? It is estimated that sometime in this century there will be nine billion human consumers of water on this blue space-marble; that would be a nine and nine zeros. To say it directly, there’s not going to be enough water at current usage rates for nine and nine zeros worth of folks to all do what we have been doing up to now with the water we have; and that’s only part of the issue: every plant on the planet – think corn, potatoes, broccoli, spinach – also requires water. I mention those four because most of us, including me, eat them, as do other living creatures that we also sometimes eat. So not only are we all connected, but one of the primary lines of



By the Shores of Kitchi Gami

connectivity is good old H₂O, and this is not New Age metaphysics; it’s straightforward scientific fact. You can be fundamentalist or atheist; it doesn’t matter.

If I were water and could stand at Head of Passes, deep in the delta, where the integrity of the greater Mississippi River is finally broken into several lesser strands, and look back upstream far enough through the twists and turns of the great fanning channels and beyond, I would be able to see myself trickling off the side of Silvermine Bald. And if I turned and looked in the other direction, out across the last expanses of marsh into the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico, where only two years have passed since the horror of



By the Shining, Big Sea Water

It is this awesome connection, this interlacing of earth and sea and sky, of rock and plant, and human that **Carl Safina** ponders so deeply and expresses so eloquently and with such bell-clear clarity, wrapped in a grace and humor that often borders on irony. And he is qualified well to speak of these things: a PhD ecologist and marine

the Deepwater Horizon disaster was visited upon these fecund and fragile seas, I could easily imagine myself a cloud, and rising on the great thermals set in motion by the intense equatorial heating of the Earth’s surface by the sun, rising high enough so that before my moisture was condensed away I could lift my face and see that same Silvermine Bald trickle and know myself whole and complete at every point along the way, a great circle with no beginning and no end.

conservationist, a MacArthur Fellow, a Guggenheim Fellow, a Pew Fellow, and founding president of the **Blue Ocean Institute**; but beyond these high-minded academic credentials, Carl Safina is a child of the waters. He is at home among not only the fishes,



crustaceans, and tiny forms whose lives are contained within those waters, but, as well, the mammals, amphibians, and birds, so much of whose existences are so completely intertwined with those marshes and shores and deeps that they are essentially merged into them. It is the intimacy of this connection that gives his voice the ring of authority when he describes what is happening in this world, how it has been and is being changed, perhaps now

An Elemental Meeting

irreparably, by the activities of two hundred and fifty years of Western Civilization's brand of progress in each part of the unending circle – land, sea, and air.

When Carl was ten, his father, a schoolteacher with a passion for raising canaries, moved his family from the Ridgewood section of Brooklyn to the village of Syosset, a short distance inland from Oyster Bay on the north side of Long Island – the Sound side. Fishing became a new passion for father and son, and free time often found them casting for bass in the then-still-teeming waters of the bay.

The Shinnecock People, the People of the Stony Shore, would have approved of Carl's passion. Their creation story tells that they have always been part of Long Island, that for thousands of years they

made their living from the bounty of the Sound and the mighty Atlantic; created beauty from the shells of their domain, so prized that it was the most desired form of wampompeag – what you know as wampum – of all.

The Shinnecock would have understood a boy's growing love of the sea. Today, though fewer in number than 1500, they still cling to a tiny part of their ancestral lands along the south shore of

Paumanok, as their island was

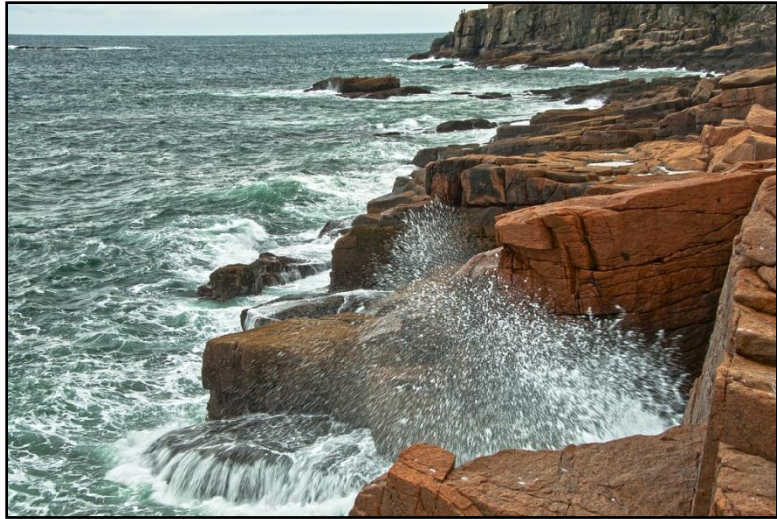
known to them; cling with a determination to endure and to thrive, with a fierce love of place that says we are here, we are a part of this, we will remain.

Who can say how the fire of love will be lit? How can one know in advance that a flame



Harboring Fugitives?

is set to be kindled? When a classmate at Syosset High School recruited Carl to help with a bird-banding survey on Fire Island, the long barrier island off of Long Island's South Shore, another light of passion was ignited. With the wild birds he encountered during that experience, it was love at first sight; and, perhaps, it was somewhat of a "chicken or egg" sort of thing in that many years after his doctoral studies were completed he would say, "...I ended up studying seabirds so that I could stay in the coastal habitats that I so loved." Safina did stay in those coastal habitats; he enrolled at the State University of New York (SUNY) Purchase, just across the Sound from his beloved Oyster Bay, and home to the Neuberger Museum of Art, known for its ancient and African art collections. There, in 1977, he received a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science.



Watching the Spray

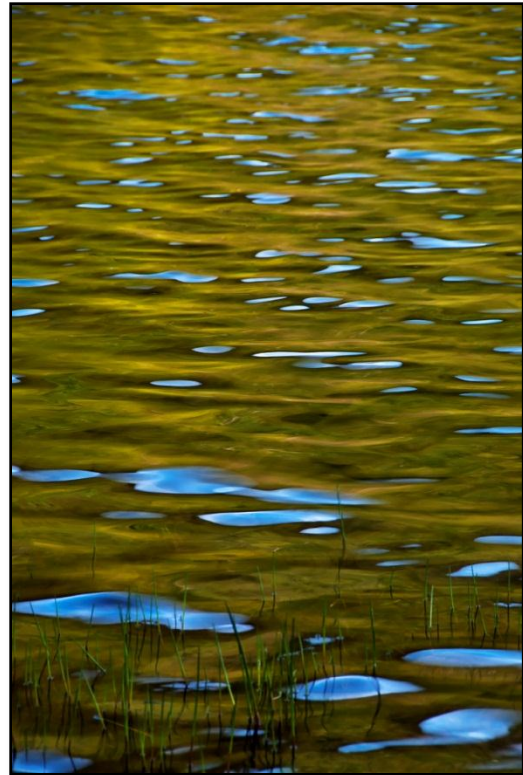
Today, one of the **Peregrine Fund's** primary research questions is why the nation-wide population of the American kestrel has declined by nearly half (47%) in the past forty-five years. This tiny, often-overlooked raptor with the aerial antics of a miniature helicopter has long been one of my favorite birds. Will it simply be allowed to disappear with so much else we are losing? When Carl Safina went to work for the Fund the year he graduated from Purchase, he spent most of his time training hawks and working with falcons for the various programs conducted by this engaging organization that had been founded at Cornell University in 1970. It was still young and located in the East during his time with them.

Following his work with the Peregrine Fund, Safina worked briefly for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection investigating suspected illegal dumping sites. Given the number of chemical companies that claim the Garden State as home and the fact that it is the most densely populated of its forty-nine other siblings, I can imagine that it was work that provided little rest and a good bit of challenge.

In 1979 Carl entered the Masters in Ecology program at Rutgers University, completing his degree in 1981, followed by his acceptance in the PhD in Ecology program, also at Rutgers, which he finished in 1987. During these years, too, he was on the staff of the **National Audubon Society**, mainly studying hawks and seabirds.

In one phase of his doctoral studies, Safina was engaged in studying the foraging habits of terns in the waters around Long Island. There are some forty-four species of terns (*Sternidae*) known world-wide, and they are, to some extent, thought of generally as the smaller cousins of the gull family (*Laridae*), although taxonomically they are actually now known to form a separate lineage with gulls and skimmers that is related to the skuas and auks. And you probably know that terns – the Arctic Tern in particular – are the Star Trek voyagers of the animal world. With a wingspan of some 31" and weighing in at a whopping 3.9 ounces, the Arctic Tern, all 13-15" of it from bill tip to tail-feather, travels in almost endless migration. Breeding in the Arctic, it then wings its way south

across the globe to the waters of the Antarctic and then back, a round trip of some 44,000 miles. Think about that figure in relation to these small facts: Arctic Terns mate for life, in a lifespan that may stretch thirty years. On the return flight to their Arctic nesting grounds, they tend to go back to the same breeding colony year-after-year. Because they typically migrate far off-shore, these birds are seldom seen away from their nesting sites, yet it is estimated that in an average lifetime an Arctic Tern will travel somewhere in the neighborhood of 1.5 million miles, that would be six zeros. When they feed, they, along with most other species of terns, engage in what is known as plunge-diving, often hovering and then suddenly swooping into the water from above. Their diet consists mainly of small fish, including herring, capelin, and cod, supplemented with crabs, mollusks, and krill; and, on their nests, they even eat insects. And though they have webbed feet, most terns rarely swim.

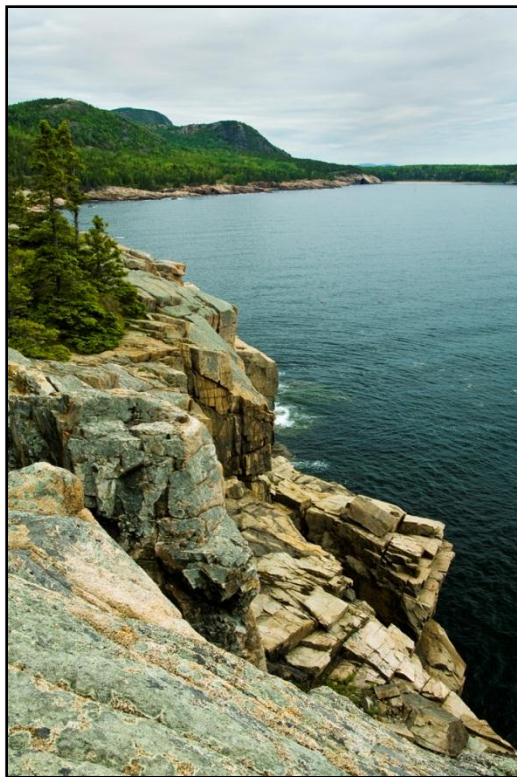


There are three tern species that breed on islands within the larger area of Long Island Sound, the Arctic not among them. Safina's focus

The Sky is Falling

was on their feeding habits, and when terns forage, they do so – except at the beginning of the season – primarily alone or in small groups; and they prefer the areas around lagoons, or estuaries, or mangrove forests. Long Island Sound offers two out of three. Thus, terns are at least part-time members of a complex community that lives between the edge of the land and the depths of the sea and the air-space above those seas. It is a long, thin line of complexity that Carl would one day describe in this way, “One can penetrate deep forest and deep ocean, but there’s no such thing as deep coast. The coast is all about borders. It’s all about edges and angles.” The coast is where things merge. To hear, or read, now, as he describes these experiences, is to know with absolute certainty the profound place that these birds hold in his memory and in his life. As he expresses it, “I’ve spent more time with terns than any other animals, first because they led me to fish, then because they led me to a doctoral dissertation, then because they led me to realize that the whole ocean is changing. In that sense terns made me who I am.” As Safina went about making his observations and recording his data, he began to pay greater attention to the larger community to which his terns belonged, and what he began to see was that many of its member populations seemed to be in decline. By the mid-1980s there seemed to be fewer striped bass, tuna, marlin, sharks, and others, as well as fewer sea turtles. The neighborhood didn’t seem nearly as full as it had in earlier years, and the absence of that density didn’t seem a good thing, but rather alarming. In 1989, an incident occurred which had a profound impact on his thinking. One day while fishing in the Atlantic some 50 miles off the coast of Fire Island, Safina encountered some other fishermen who were hauling in “ridiculous amounts” of Bluefin tuna. One of the boatmen in the vicinity came on the radio and said, “Guys, maybe we should save some for tomorrow.” Another fisherman came back and said, “Hey, they

didn't leave any buffalo for me." In that moment the realization came to Carl that, through overfishing, entire species of fish could literally disappear forever; and he began



to make reference to this possibility, which he came to call "the last buffalo hunt."

It was becoming clear to him that fish needed the same protections that were being afforded to birds and other animals. As he stated it, "People never thought of fish as wildlife. They just thought fish was something that wound up in the fish store, or on a plate in a restaurant."

Having now completed his doctorate, in 1990, Safina founded the **Living Oceans Program** at the National Audubon Society, where he would remain for a decade as vice-president for ocean conservation. At the same time, from 1991-1994, he was a member of the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council of the U.S. Department of Commerce, to which he had been appointed by the Secretary of Commerce. It was in 1998 that Safina published his first book, ***Song for the Blue Ocean, Encounters along the World's Coasts and Beneath the Seas***, which was received with high praise. Reviewers lauded its readability, its "poetic descriptions of the sea", and its heartfelt pleas for conservation. It was named a *New York Times* **Notable**

I Must Go Down to the Sea Book of the Year, and a *Literary Journal* **Best Science Book**, and won a *Los Angeles Times* award for non-fiction and the **Lannan Literary Award** for non-fiction. Perhaps it was all the attention brought to him by the release of *Blue Ocean* that led, in 2000, to his being awarded a **John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship Grant**, popularly nicknamed the "genius" grant. It was the time and the money he needed to consider and create the projects that were truly meaningful to him, and which he felt would best serve the ideas and needs of oceanic conservation. The oceans were brimming with needs, and Safina was flush with ideas.

In 2003, Safina and a colleague, Mercédès Lee, whom he had met while at the Audubon Society, founded the **Blue Ocean Institute**, www.BlueOcean.org, a conservation non-profit with a somewhat unique approach. The staff of the institute sees its role as studying and articulating how the ocean is changing and how everything humans do – both on land and in the oceans – affects the waters, wildlife, and people of the world. It is the philosophical belief of the organization that dire warnings and predictions don't move people to make the changes necessary to beneficially impact the environments of the seas or the land; and it sees itself as a voice of encouragement, guidance, and hope. Given the rancor that surrounds most discussions of conservation and change, climate change in particular, the work of Blue Ocean Institute seems often like a **Mary Oliver** poem in a scene from ***Road Warrior***, but for nine years their work has slowly made new friends, and their voice of hope persists, like the Shinnecock.

What may be truly unique about Blue Ocean Institute is its stated approach of the intent to use science, art, and literature – all three in concert – to forge a closer bond with the

natural world, and especially the world's oceans. The institute believes that people who are clearly informed with meaningful facts will make better choices on behalf of the seas around us. If they're not right about that, I somehow expect that the ride we're in for is going to be a whole lot bumpier than the one that's already headed our way; sort of like, "Where are we going, and why am I in this hand basket?"

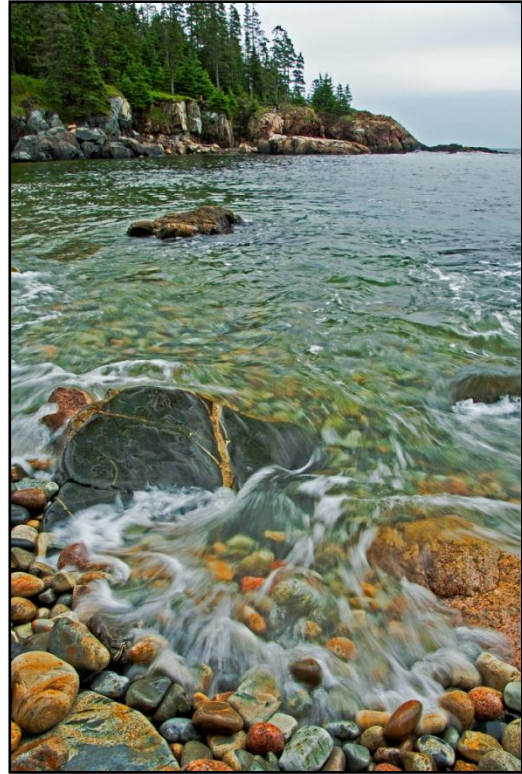
Song for the Blue Ocean is a fish story, a tale of adventure on the high-seas, and an oceanic travelogue. At its center are the lives of the great ocean-going fish species of the world and the perils that have diminished their numbers so drastically, primarily due to overfishing and pollution, even in my own lifetime. It is a plea for understanding and restraint, and an admonition of what we stand to lose should our restraint fail to guide us.

Having taken us beneath the sea for a first look into his world, Safina turned our attention next to the skies above the waters with the tale of Amelia, as he named her, a Laysan albatross, whose story is offered a paean to her kind and a cautionary to the rest of us. Laysan albatrosses are remarkable, exemplary birds.

One among their number, whose anthropocentric name is "Wisdom" is the oldest known wild bird in the Northern Hemisphere. Wisdom is a spry sixty-year-old, who was seen in 2011 on a nest in the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, which lies within the newly created Midway Atoll National Monument, rearing a newborn chick. How do we know this beautiful creature's age? Well, it seems Wisdom was first banded in 1956 while on her nest as a new mother; and it is a well-established biological fact that Laysan albatrosses do not mature sexually until their fifth year, meaning Wisdom was at least five years old when she was first banded. The math is fairly straightforward.

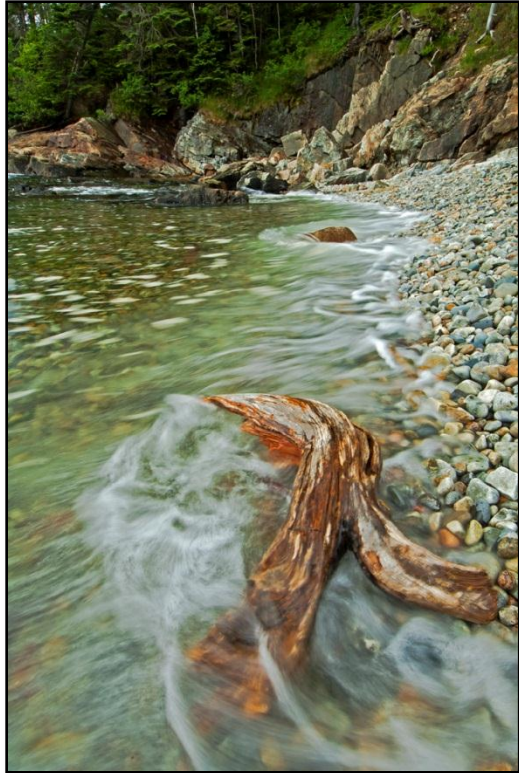
Writing in ***Eye of the Albatross: Visions of Hope and Survival***, Safina offers this, "Like the albatross, we need the seas more than the seas need us. Will we understand this well enough to reap all the riches a little restraint, cooperation, and compassion will bring?" Like the terns which he so admires, albatrosses log lifetime flight numbers in the millions-of-miles range.

If Wisdom and her species continue to nest on Midway, however, she, and they, could be in real danger. It is estimated that each year thousands of Laysan albatross chicks die from lead paint poisoning, the paint a left-over from the U.S. Navy's 90-building compound constructed primarily seventy years ago during the height of World War II. Our capacity to destroy reaches back into history with just as much deadly potential as it possesses today and portends tomorrow. Though we have known with scientific certainty for the past 30-40 years that it takes only small amounts of lead to produce highly toxic effects, man has known for thousands of years of the toxic properties of lead generally. So Wisdom's ancestors survived the fashion world's feather-hunting craze of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only to find themselves staring down



First the Tide Rushes in...

the barrel of a loaded paint gun filled with a spray as lethal as a wad of # 2 shot, and all of their six and-a-half feet of wingspan couldn't get them out of the neighborhood quickly enough, especially since they had considered it their neighborhood for thousands of years before the Navy even showed up.



Also like terns, Laysan albatrosses mate for life; and during the five years before they are all grown up, they engage in elaborate pair bonding rituals with the bird which will become that life partner. Some of these rituals are elaborate dances that showcase as many as 25 stylized movements. Perhaps they just want to be sure. As a literate people, we have been cursed with the burden of albatrosses as negative impressions for over two hundred years, ever since Colridge forced the Ancient Mariner to wear the one he had killed around his neck as penance for the ill-conceived deed. Perhaps the fairer thing would have been to let the albatross live and force it to wear the Ancient Mariner around its neck as a burden for sharing the planet with humans. That's pretty much what happened anyway.

...Plants a Kiss on the Shore In 2003, *Eye of the Albatross* won the **John Burroughs Medal**, awarded annually since 1926 to literary efforts that combine scientific accuracy, descriptions of fieldwork, and creative natural history writing. It was also awarded the first-ever **National Academies Communication Award**, as the most effective book published that year at explaining a scientific topic to the general public. It fit well with the opening of the Blue Ocean Institute.

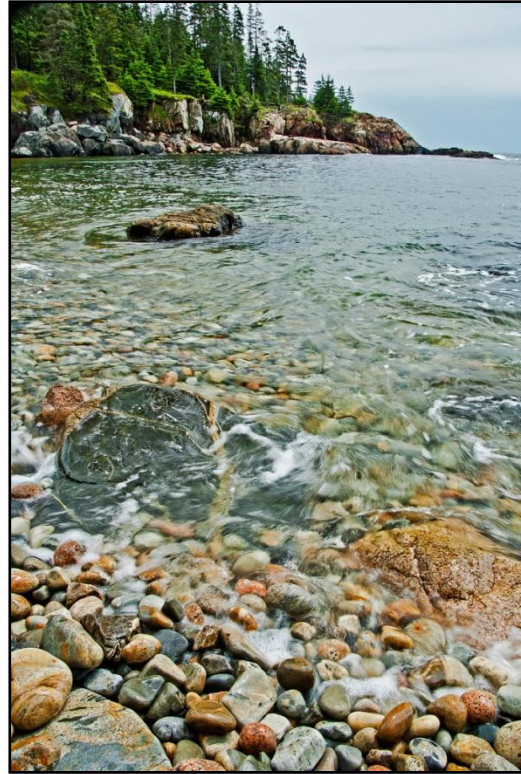
Dermochelys coriacea is a living dinosaur. Do not take these words lightly; it is literally true. We would never call it either *Dermochelys coriacea*, or a dinosaur; we would say something like Leatherback Turtle, or maybe Lute Turtle, or perhaps Trunkback Turtle. Regardless, it would remain that this marvelous animal is not only straight out of a time from the mid-Cretaceous; it is many other things as well. There was a time when, coming ashore to lay her clutch of the next generation of Leatherbacks, a mother turtle's greatest fear might have been the *Allosaurus* or *Gigantosaurus* lurking over the sand dune, but that would have been a mere 70 million years ago. Today her concern would lie more with the activities of, yep, you guessed it: us, again. In all of that time, *Dermochelys* is basically unchanged, but now it is the only species in its genus and the only genus in its family. As a creature it is pretty much existential.

The Leatherback's diet consists mainly of jelly fish, and it commonly mistakes the plastic flotsam of human pollution for its prey. There have been individuals found with nearly 11 pounds of plastic in their stomachs. They are also vulnerable to modern shrimping and fishing practices. Longlines, buoy anchor lines, other ropes and cables are sources of danger, often resulting in injury or drowning. Theft of their eggs for nutrition and aphrodisiacs takes a toll, too. It is estimated that one egg out of a thousand laid results in a mature adult, so it is understandable that, as a species, they would at this time be listed as "critically endangered." Although Atlantic populations are stable and possibly

growing, Pacific populations have been in rapid decline for the past two decades; and no answer has yet been found for the demise. But why should we care whether this multidimensional critter lives, or goes the way of the other dinosaurs?

The Leatherback is the largest of all living sea turtles. Males can reach seven feet in length and weigh close to a ton. They are deep-sea diving stars, reaching depths of 4,000', deeper than any whale, during plunges that may take up to an hour-and-a-half. Because they can generate and maintain internal body heat, unlike their cold-blooded reptilian cousins, they can go into waters not suited to the cold-bloods, including the dives I mentioned. When in health, the species has the widest global distribution of any reptile in the world, making them all the more worthwhile as predators of jelly fish, whose species they work hard to keep in check. They have been clocked in open water moving at over 21 miles per hour,

Although we are learning more and more about them, much remains a mystery. Their lifespan is unknown, and nearly all of their activity – other than the females coming to land to lay their

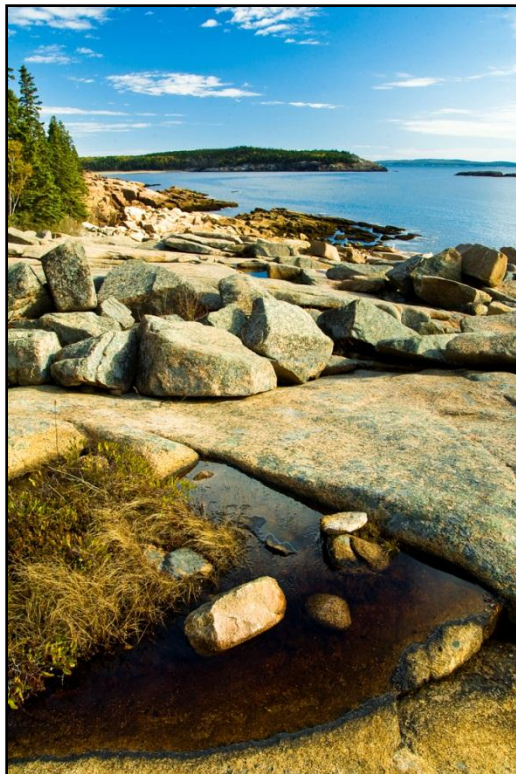


...Then Rolls Out to Sea

eggs – takes place in the deep oceans of the world: most of their foraging, their mating, their specific interactions among themselves and with other creatures, if any.

It would seem natural then, that Safina would devote his third literary effort to this immensely interesting pelagic animal, whose recovery from an imperiled future seems so possible, and yet so uncertain.

The Voyage of the Turtle, in 2006, was vintage Carl. On journeys from the Melanesian Archipelago's New Guinea jungle beaches to the colder waters off Newfoundland, and stops in-between that included both surprising discoveries and reasons for concern off the coast of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, Safina weaves an engaging story. It is a story of resistance to change, determination to protect, and compromise; of loss and line-holding; of creatures whose ancestors roamed the land before creatures called mammals even existed; and of humans whose impulses seem to roam from great apathy to great concern with regard to the other life that shares the planet.



...And the Sea is Very Still

And, as is his nature, in conclusion there is optimistic conviction: He tells the story of the Seri People of the Sonoran Coast of Mexico. Seri culture was built historically around its relationship with the Leatherback, whose periodic arrival to their shores precipitated the celebration of their most sacred rites and festivals.

When Leatherback visitations became more erratic and widely-spaced in the 1960s-70s there was great concern among the Seri, and eventually in 2005, having had no visit from a living Leatherback since 1980, the tribal elders decided to send a delegation to the Leatherback's last known locations. Safina was invited, along with a few others, to join this expedition from the Seri



Surf 'n Tree

homeland to the Pacific-facing tip of Baja California, and his telling of the experience is what makes me appreciate both his science and his humanity.

Taken together, the Seri and the Leatherback offer a wonderful symbol of faith, determination, endurance, and hope: a summing up of where we are and where we might want to consider placing our energies if we are to give to the future anything worth having; and the voyage of the turtle becomes the journey of us all.

Fast forward four years. It is late-2009; Safina's next book project is about to go from concept to working model. He will take the coming year, 2010, and write it, not so much as a diary, but as a running commentary of what he sees and does. He will include his travels across the globe during the year, but he will spend most of the time at home, his home on the eastern shore of Long Island, on a marvelous piece of ground he has lived on for several years, known, even before he acquired it, as Lazy Point.

Taking a dilapidated cottage, which he describes as, "Better houses have been demolished," he restored its vitality and turned it into a sanctuary, a place in which to soothe away the weariness of a world in transition, close to so many of the things he loves so dearly; and it is from here that he will observe the land, the waters, and the skies around him, noting the changes and that which remains; the comings and goings; the births, the lives, and deaths; the interactions; and what all of this may be saying and mean in the context of the larger world.

I picked up a copy of ***The View from Lazy Point, A Natural Year in an Unnatural World*** very shortly after it was published in early-2011, and I did not put it down until I had finished it. Even before I had begun, I knew I was going to like it when I saw that he had used an **E. B. White** quote on the page before the table of contents: "I arise in the morning torn between a desire to save the world and a desire to savor the world. This makes it hard to plan the day." And at the end of his short prelude he says, "I've come to see that the geometry of human progress is an expanding circle of compassion. And that nature and human dignity require each other. And I believe that – if the word sacred means anything at all – the world exists as the one truly sacred place." And with that we are launched, and begin to see the world of the endless circle through the eyes of Carl

Safina. Of his recounting he says, “So this story is about the tension created when those things mistakenly called ‘the real world’ – though they are entirely artificial – continually intrude on the real world. In a real place, the mysteries of ages pile thick with enduring truths and complex beauties.”

Lazy Point is, indeed, a real place, and Safina shows it to us as, perhaps, only he can, for he has attuned himself to its rhythms so finely that he alerts us to what most of us might well have overlooked; but in so doing we are instructed in the possibilities of what the desire for attunement can bring anyone, if we are willing to let it. For what Carl Safina sees in Lazy Point, I can see in Western North Carolina, or you can see wherever you happen to call home; and as we attune ourselves to the smaller realities of our own place, so then can we expand that attunement outward to become all-inclusive.

In addition to the depth in which Lazy Point and its implications are revealed, Safina shows us the far-flung globe, and events and realities that are re-shaping the world from Alaska to the Arctic, to the Antarctic, to the Caribbean, to the Western Pacific. He shares these things with us with the observant eye of a scientist and the soul of a poet, not in the dry language of the empiricist, but with the mind-altering range of the story-teller; and the stories he tells are fascinating, eye-opening, and often heart-rending; and we are left, not on the periphery as mere listeners, but in the midst of it all as co-conspirators.

He tells us tales of determined osprey families, and the hunting of mako sharks; of beached bottlenose dolphins and bluefish dinners; of the resilience of horseshoe crabs and the awesome feats of Monarch butterflies; and of the Long Island revolving door through which seemingly passes the entire spectrum of wandering seabirds.

And true to form, he takes us, not in the straight line of linear progression, but rather in the real time of the circle in which our world exists, ending where he began, ready to begin again.

And what might be taken away from spending a year with Carl Safina? Maybe it is this: “We must understand three things formerly unknown: that Life is a fully networked community; that because expanding knowledge suggests remaining ignorance, we ought to act with humility, reverence, and caution; and that the story we write with our lives affects those living near and far, and not just now, but in the near and distant futures.”

Albert Einstein once said, “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

Perhaps his own words say it best, “The compass of compassion asks not ‘What is good for me?’ but ‘What is good?’ Not what is best for me but what is best. Not what is right for me, but what is right. Not ‘How much can we take?’ but ‘How much ought we leave?’ and ‘How much might we give?’ Not what is easy but what is worthy. Not what is



Fishes, Dreamers, and Me

practical but what is moral. With each action we decide whether to sow the grapes of wrath or the seeds of peace.

“The compass of compassion suggests that very few things, each simple, are needed. We shouldn’t hate people for the group they were born into, or because we hold conflicting beliefs about things that cannot be proven, seen, or measured. We can’t infinitely take more from – or infinitely add more people to – a finite planet. While living in a world endowed with self-renewing energy, we can’t run civilization on energy that diminishes the world. If we can get these simple things under control, I think we could be okay. Simple does not mean easy. Yet more than ever before in history, we can now understand what’s needed....

“The most appropriate response to the world is to realize, with awe, the ferocious mystery of being alive in it. And act accordingly. The worst thing anyone should be able to say about their life is also the greatest thing anyone can say: ‘I tried my best.’”

What’s Now?:

Warmer and Nearer

That we can regain what we have abused not only matters, it instructs. It inspires.... But it’s no small matter to go from letting birds and bass and seals recover to taking the giant steps required to rechart the poles, regrow forests, refill the seas with fish, save the tropics’ reefs, stabilize the ocean’s chemistry, secure agriculture, quench the fire, tame growth, recognize the infinite possibilities, lighten up, and calm down.

Carl Safina

from *The View from Lazy Point*

In his 60s song, *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, **Bob Dylan** penned the now famous line, “You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.” I don’t need one to tell me that it’s getting warmer, either; but he’s been telling me anyway. In the mountains of Western North Carolina, for example, the month of March averaged 9.7° warmer per day than the historic average. Of March’s 31 days, twenty-eight were warmer, while only three were cooler than their historic daily average. On March 20, the average temperature across the mountains was approximately 23° warmer than the known history for that date. You can decide for yourself if those numbers mean anything. What I do know is that the blooming cycle for this year’s wildflowers has been about two weeks ahead of what my experience over the past twenty years tells me is the



Green

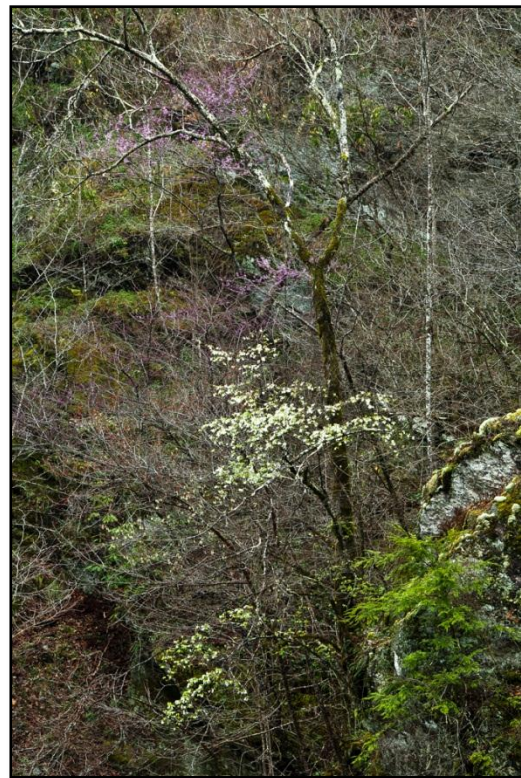
typical blooming schedule. Of course, these figures and this experience stand in stark contrast to the winter of 2009-10, when there were record snowfalls and snow stayed on the ground, nearly continuously, from the beginning of January until mid-March; and the blooming cycle for Spring 2010 was pushed back by over a week, at least as deeply into the season as the beginning of June. Even with the extremes of that winter, 2011 ended up by tying 2005 as the warmest year the history of record-keeping has ever recorded. What I can also report is that, according to NASA's records, of the top ten warmest years on Earth since record-keeping was established in 1880, nine of them have occurred since 2000, and that the only other year on this dubious list is 1998.



The Cades Cove Daffodils of February

Since the warmer-than-average temperatures have continued through April and May, albeit with some modulation, the blooming cycle has continued to keep ahead of itself by a roughly two-week margin.

Of course the Smokies are always beautiful, and if you adjust to the changes, you can still be rewarded. At present the mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) are just past peak in several locations, especially the southern end of the Blue Ridge Parkway from Big Witch Gap south to the Park entrance at Oconaluftee Visitor Center. There are also still some Catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) blooming along Thomas Divide, as well as on the last stretches of the Parkway. You might also take note that the Catawbias around Craggy Gardens – the Dome and the Pinnacle – should be peaking this week. Meanwhile the Rosebays (*Rhododendron maximum*) are showing signs that this may be more of a growth year than a bloom year. It looks like they will also be about two weeks ahead of schedule with whatever blooming they decide to produce. By the third week of June I would expect to see them beginning to peak in the Upper Oconaluftee River drainages and, perhaps, in the Walker Camp Prong watershed on the Tennessee side, as well, with Little River, Roaring Fork, Greenbrier, and Tremont being close behind. There are



Lookin' for Eliot

some lovely flame azaleas (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) blooming on both sides of the Bunches Bald tunnel on the Parkway, but they will be past peak by this weekend , so you should go soon.

This may be the Summer of Little Yellow Flowers and White Clusters: At present, there



is a lot of hairy buttercup (*Ranunculus hispidus*) and yellow ragwort (*Senecio* anonymous) covering open hillsides and roadsides, and in these same areas wild hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*) are extremely prolific, in fact, I don't ever recall seeing so many and so early.

Bowman's root (*Gillenia trifoliata*) can now be seen commonly in the middle elevations, and goat's beard (*Aruncus dioicus*) is also beginning to be prevalent.

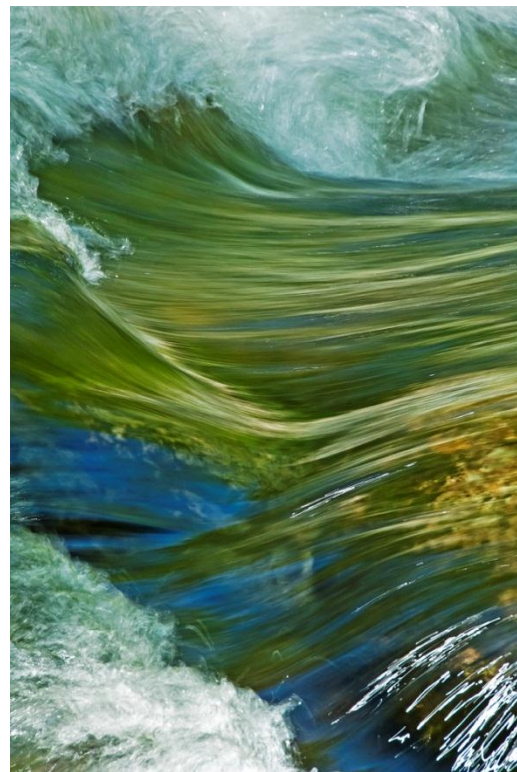
Storm Comin'

Ox-eye daisies (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*) are blooming in all elevations, and are past prime in Cades Cove but can still be used as landscape foregrounds.

Spiderwort (*Tradescantia subaspera* v. *montana*) is quite profuse along the Parkway near Jenkins Ridge Overlook. If you act quickly you can still photograph the Indian pink (*Spigelia marilandica*) blooming on Rich Mountain Road. Make sure if you do that you are ready to leave Cades Cove since Rich Mountain is a one-way drive into Tuckaleechee Cove and Townsend, Tennessee.

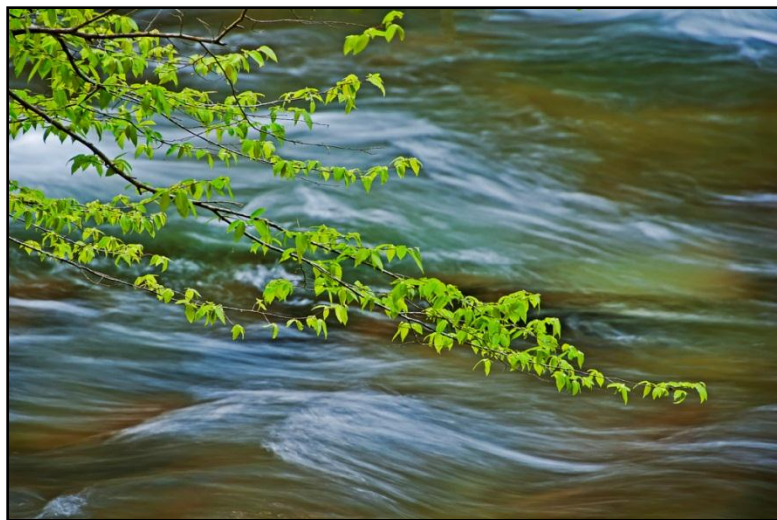
At the moment there are some non-flowering species worth considering, too. The new crops of hay scented (*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*), New York (*Thelypteris novaboracensis*), maidenhair (*Adiantum pedatum*), and cinnamon (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) ferns are up in the lower elevations and coming in strongly in the upper reaches. There are wonderful small fern forests along Newfound Gap Road, Little River Road, and Clingman's Dome Road.

It's a little odd to consider that the next newsletter I produce will be at the end of August, because the way the season is hurrying along all of the flowers in the Smokies may have bloomed by then. Mother Nature is always full of surprises, so we'll wait to see what she does.



Homeward Bound

There has been enough precipitation in the mountains so that, even though we're running a little bit of a deficit for the year, the levels seem just about what you might expect for this time of year. It's a wonderful time to think about emerald green reflections in places like Little River, Big Creek, Walker Camp Prong, and Middle Prong of Little Pigeon. The early and late light can add a golden cast to the green that makes



the rushing waters look like floating jewels.

Sunset in the Smokies is an ideal opportunity from Morton Overlook. The overlook is open but there is construction going on all around, so allow a little extra drive time to get there from Gatlinburg, Townsend, or Cherokee. During the next couple of weeks the ball of the sun will set almost directly down the valley of Walker Camp Prong and the fresh green growth around the overlook can be

Running with the Flow

incorporated into an effective foreground for wide-angle or normal focal length work. Sunrise is best photographed from Clingman's Dome, the parking lot or the tower. The extreme east end of the parking lot is great because of the foreground possibilities.

	June 1	June 21	June 30	July 1	July 31	August 1	August 31
Sunrise:	6:19 a.m.	6:18a.m.	6:21a.m.	6:22a.m.	6:41a.m.	6:42a.m.	7:05a.m.
Sunset:	8:43p.m.	8:52p.m.	8:53p.m.	8:53p.m.	8:38p.m.	8:38p.m.	8:02p.m.

I might also mention that sunrise from the Miller's Cove Overlook on the Foothills Parkway West can be a worthwhile adventure. This road begins in Walland, Tennessee and travels westward for seventeen miles to US 129 along Chilhowee Lake. Miller's Cove is the first true overlook on Foothills Parkway. This time of year the sun rises on the extreme left of the parking lot, so photographing from the upper end of the strip is a better idea, as is allowing the light to come into Miller's Cove from the left and shooting into the cove with the indirect sidelight.

Before we get too far away from biology, I want to mention, too, that the mosses in Greenbrier and in Roaring Fork are particularly lush at present. The winter and early spring precipitation has kept them moist, so they are in prime condition for stream work and macro work.

This part of the transition from spring into summer is filled with excellent opportunities to consider the atmosphere. Differential heating and cooling produce some wonderful cloud forms almost daily: billowing cumulus giants; high puffy cirrus strands and balls; dark, moody thunderheads; and ground-hugging fog. All of these, when combined with the powerful lines of ridges, or lushly covered hillsides, encourage combinations of

elements that make dramatic statements about these ancient mountains – the story of the connection of land, water, and sky.

This is also a wonderful part of the year in which to consider architectural work in places like Cades Cove and Cataloochee Valley. Great Smoky Mountains National Park has the largest collection of historical log structures of any park in the system, places like the John Oliver Cabin, the Elijah Oliver Cabin, and the Carter-Shields Cabin in Cades Cove; and the Hannah Cabin and Cook Cabin in Little Cataloochee, and the Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse near Metcalf Bottoms.

And there are many other historical structures as well: the Caldwell House and Beech Grove Schoolhouse in Cataloochee, and Palmer Chapel Methodist Church. There are grist mills: Mingus Mill in the Oconaluftee Valley and Cable Mill in Cades Cove. If you want to throw in a short hike, consider the Willis Baxter Cabin up Maddron Bald Trail near Cosby; and if you want to get really serious strike out for the Mount Cammerer Fire Tower high up on the ridge that the North Carolinians call Sharptop and the Tennesseans know as White Rock. It's one of only two east of the Mississippi that was built according to the western parks fire tower design. And that alone makes it special.

In early July it's good to begin watching for the elk mothers as they start bringing their new calves down from the high country and into Cataloochee Valley, or Oconaluftee Valley to show them off.

So, the next three months are full of possibility in every part of the Park. *Yes*, it is warmer; and the trend over the past decade supports that conclusion; and *No*, as an individual I probably can't do much to change that; but there are things that *we* can do whether you believe we're causing the changes, or not. And while we're doing them, we should learn that the Earth and the mountains are finite systems that can be altered only so much without irreparable harm resulting; but while we're concerned with all of the downside problems of the planet, we should never cease to appreciate the amazing beauty we have been given. Just perhaps, we can find in that beauty the inspiration we need.



Cumuli and Laurel

A Tip is Worth...?

Steps: Taking the Final Ones

I trust that the creative eye will continue to function, whatever the technological innovations may develop.

Ansel Adams, 1983

Two years before he made the sidebar comment above, in 1981, **Ansel Adams** spoke these words, “I eagerly await new concepts and processes. I believe that the electronic image will be the next major advance. Such systems will have their own inherent and inescapable structural characteristics, and the artist and functional practitioner will again strive to comprehend and control them.”

Ansel was truly a forward-looking artist and technician, and he did, indeed, welcome innovation and new technologies; but perhaps the later utterance, made in the year before his death, was the reflection, over a lifetime, of a master who has seen more than half a century of technological change in his craft, and who has understood that what ultimately remains of creative photographic imagery, in the leeward lie of all that technology, is the functioning of that inner quality that informs the creative imagination, the creative vision.

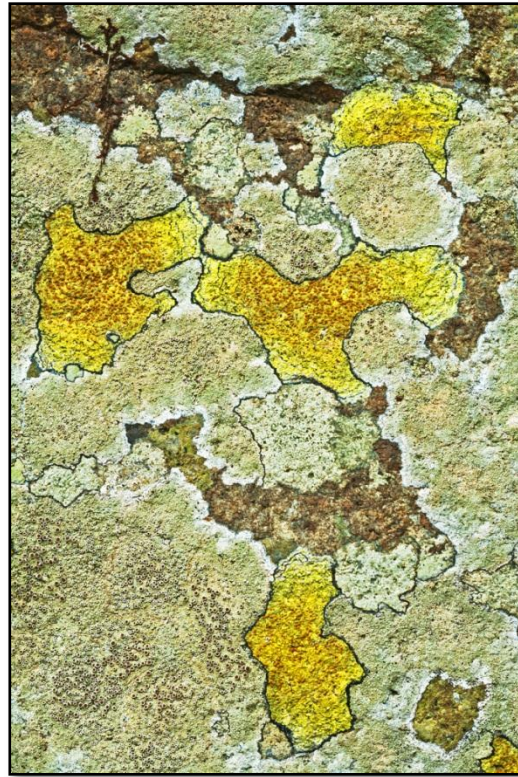
We have been examining a series of steps which seem to me to be the essence of creative image-making from the mechanistic side of the of the endeavor, from the ABC's and 1,2,3's of how to take the unique vision that you possess and manifest it into a form – most likely a digital file form – that you can then use to produce some functional output, whether a print, or merely something you look at and share on a screen.

The last of those **Steps**:

7. Use a cable release and a lens hood/shield. Check your focus. Set the needed exposure values and check the depth-of-field. Is the horizon tilted? Is wind/motion a factor? Can you change ISO to your advantage? Check the frame edge one more time.

8. After the image is taken check your highlights (blinkies) and your histogram. Adjust, if needed, and re-shoot.

These seem like such straightforward considerations, don't they; and they are, but it's amazing how many times we can observe the failure to act upon them until it's either too late or almost too late to do anything about it. A lot of the oversights come from simply not realizing the importance of doing it differently; some come from the mistaken belief that the technology – in this case the processing software – can fix any oversight of which we may be guilty. Perhaps one day; but not today; so for me there's **Step 7**: Vibration and a failure to make sure proper focus has been achieved are, in my experience, the two most common causes of fuzzy images, with accidental camera/tripod shake being a distant third. The vibrations set in motion in the transfer of energy from the fingertips to the shutter are commonly all it takes to keep an image from being tack-sharp. If sharpness is not your goal – and sometimes it isn't – then this is okay; but if a sharp image is important, then doing everything you can to prevent vibration should come as natural as breathing. Using the mirror lock-up feature that



Lichen World Atlas

many cameras have is a good start; and if you don't possess a cable release/remote, then using the self-timer is a viable alternative. Likewise, preventing lens flare is usually a desirable end that is frequently overlooked, especially when doing landscape, and particularly wide-angle landscape, work. Creating the habit of shading your lens will, indeed, come when you've had to "fix" or throw away one-too-many images that were unusable because of flare; and part of that habit will be the increased sensitivity to the many situations in the field in which flare is possible, or likely.

When you are working in changing light, whether you shoot in manual or aperture priority, it is necessary to constantly check the exposure values you have set to make sure they continue to reflect the light that exists in that moment. Even when the light is unchanging, it's just a good idea to check the values one last time to make certain of the accurate transfer of your light management decisions from eye to camera.

Is your depth-of-field adequate for the decision you have made about what you want to see sharply-rendered in your image? The ability to check depth in "live view" is a major advancement over the depth-of-field preview button, and it will be truly wonderful when live view can be used without draining so much of the battery's power. If it's not an option for you, you can still use the preview button. It's often aggravating, but it works.

A tilted horizon can be a major distraction in an otherwise wonderful image. Yes, it's usually salvageable in post-processing, but it costs you pixels, where a little extra care would save those pixels and the time/work involved in making the necessary corrections.

Motion blur where motion blur is not desirable can be a real frustration, and wind movement seems to be increasing everywhere I travel. Patience is always

possible, but it becomes harder

to practice when there doesn't seem to be any hope that it will pay off. Other than patience, what can you do to overcome motion blur? Can you raise your ISO enough to give yourself a fast enough shutter speed to freeze the motion? The advances in "noise" reduction technology have given us opportunities we've never enjoyed before in terms of using higher ISO's as a part of the "exposure triangle" to gain faster shutter speeds.

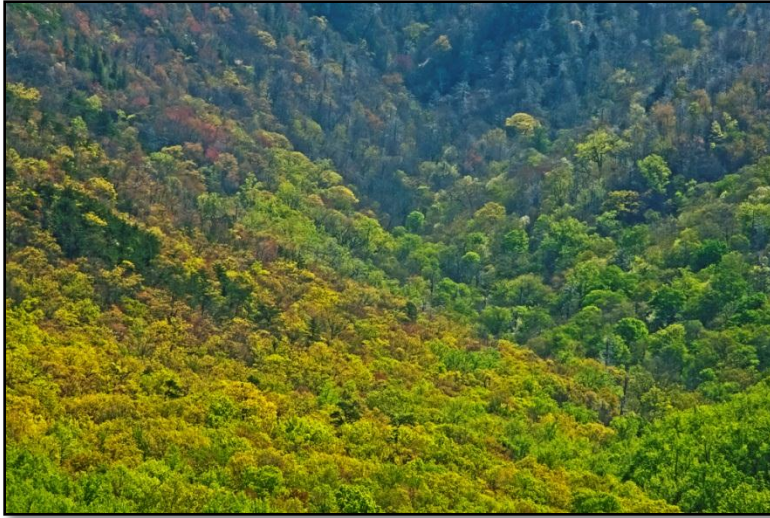
Post-processing advances have likewise increased our abilities in this regard. Concern must be given to the ultimate purpose of creating the image. A high ISO still won't serve an image intended as a large over-the-sofa art print, but for projection it might work just fine.

And just one more time, check the perimeter of the frame before you release the shutter. It's amazing what you'll often find lurking there just waiting to become the distraction you never saw, but which was hiding there the whole time. I confess, I'm lazy; I hate post-processing work that's geared toward fixing rather than toward expressing art; so I tend to be obsessive about checking the perimeter in the viewfinder



Balsam in a Cloud

Step 8 is the affirmation of all of your tedious step-work; and the knowledge that all is well, or that something needs to be changed. In one of my programs I talk about camera



“settings” that contribute to an efficient and meaningful workflow. Among those settings are considerations of the highlight (blinkies) tool and the histogram. These are, in my mind, the two most important exposure evaluation tools that a camera possesses, and on my camera I have made it so that I can access them quickly, if not automatically. The highlight tool is immediately engaged, and by pressing a single button I can engage my histogram. I

Greening Up!

want to know as instantaneously as possible if the file I have created matches the light management calculations I have made – assuming I have made reasonably good ones – or whether some adjustment on my part is appropriate, or needed.

By using the magnifier tool on the LCD display I can also quickly check the edges of the frame to see if the camera saw – and recorded – anything that I overlooked which I need to eliminate by adjusting and re-shooting.

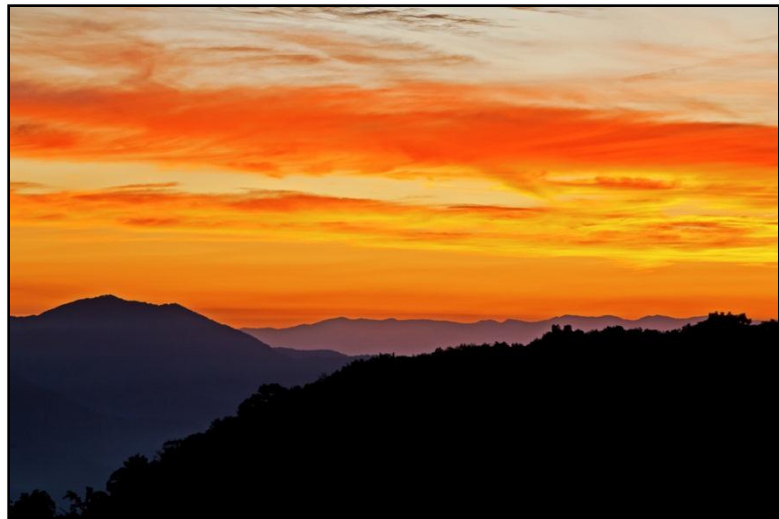
I have come to believe, as have all of the professionals whom I know, that, regardless of whether it's intended

processing anticipates HDR or any of the creative filters that have become so popular, the more well-captured is the file, the more creative can be, and will be, its ultimate use after post-processing.

Moreover, the easier post-processing will be, saving you time and energy. And after all, didn't we become nature photographers to maximize the time we spend in nature?

I return to Ansel Adams: “A great photograph is one that fully expresses what one feels, in the deepest sense, about what is being photographed.”

In the Steps that I have offered it is my purpose to offer anyone a possibility of approaching the image-making process in such a way that the mechanics of the process become so automatic and second-nature they are acted with a bare minimum of awareness. I do this in the belief that if this is the way this part of the process happens, then the visionary aspect of it, the really creative and fun part of photography will take



Dawn of the Elements

wing and fly, and in its flight will carry you to the innermost depths of the world of your imagination.

As for EarthSong/Walking in Beauty...

Walking in Beauty

As I walk with Beauty
As I walk, as I walk
The universe is walking with me
In beauty it walks before me
In beauty it walks behind me
In beauty it walks below me
In beauty it walks above me
Beauty is on every side
As I walk, I walk with beauty

Traditional Diné Prayer

...knowledge and consciousness are two quite different things. Knowledge is like a product we consume and store. All we need are good closets. By consciousness I mean a state of being “awake” to the world throughout our organism. This kind of consciousness requires not closets but an organism attuned to the finest perceptions and responses. It allows experience to breathe through it as light enters and changes a room. When knowledge is transformed into consciousness and into will, ah then we are on the high road indeed.

M.C. Richards

from Centering In Pottery, Poetry, and the Person

The sun rose on May 15 in a mostly overcast sky; it was an absolutely beautiful day. The forecast called for a 40% chance of afternoon thunderstorms, but it was wonderfully cool at 8:00a.m., when I met a group of nine serious-minded photographers who would accompany me on a pleasant walk of 2.6 miles over one of Great Smoky Mountains National Park’s most interesting short trails, all in the name of raising some well-deserved funds for a great organization, **Friends of the Smokies**.

Flat Creek Trail is a popular ramble, but one that never seems to draw huge crowds. It features some great wildflowers in season, some attractive stream possibilities, and some of the most



Rob Ponders a Flat Creek Dilemma

beautiful beech forest anywhere in the Park. Its elevation makes it a pleasant stroll even in mid-summer.

We hit the trail around 8:45a.m. and finally made it to the other end around 2:30p.m., not bad timing for folks who want to be creative.

It was an excellent experience, and I want to thank everyone who joined me in this worthy cause; and, also, Friends' Staff, **Holly Demuth**, director of the North Carolina Friends Office, and **Hannah Epperson**, for their effective work in coordinating the event.

We plan to offer a longer workshop in the future that will present some really neat features. So keep your eyes open for the announcement.

July 13-15 I will be presenting a program on wide-angle technique and creativity that I've called ***From Here to There***

and Back Again: A Journey

through the Wide-Angle Lens at the

annual **New England Camera Club Council Conference** on the

campus of the **University of Massachusetts in Amherst**. The

bill of fare includes some of the

greats of nature photography,

including **Joe McNally** and **Bill**

Fortney, and I am honored to have

been asked to participate. If you're

in Western Massachusetts in mid-

July, you'll enjoy this great annual

event that showcases the tremendous beauty of the Pioneer Valley.



July 28 I'll be offering the first of two one-day workshops for this summer. It's called **Water, Wildflowers, and Light**. We'll focus our attention on the western portion of the **Blue Ridge Parkway** and the

adjacent portion of **Great Smoky Mountains National Park**, where

water, wildflowers, and light

abound. As always, lunch is on me

and the day will be awesome.

The day begins with a sunrise shoot

at a beautiful location, followed by

time spent shooting the best of

whatever happens to be available

with regard to water and

wildflowers. This is based on the

scouting I'll do in the week before

the workshop to ensure we really do

have optimum opportunities

On **September 15**, I'll be leading the second one-day event called **The Cusp of**

Autumn. This workshop will focus on **Cades Cove** and other nearby Park locations.

Tuition of each of these events is **\$175**. For additional information call me



at **(828) 788-0687**; or email me at don@earthsongphotography.com.

In August I'll be teaching at both **John C. Campbell Folk School** in Brasstown, North Carolina, www.folkschool.org; and **Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts** in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, www.arrowmont.org.

The dates of the **Arrowmont Class** are **August 12-18**; and the dates of the **Folk School Class** are **August 26 – September 1**. For more information on either of these wonderful experiences contact **Arrowmont** at **(865) 436-5860**, and the **Folk School** at **(828) 837-2275**.

There are a pair of outstanding fall weeklong workshop events that still have openings, but are filling quickly: the **Upper Peninsula, Michigan Workshop** and the **Acadia/Mount Desert Island, Maine Workshop**.

September 29 – October 5: Upper Peninsula, Michigan Fall Workshop. Baraga, Michigan and Munising, Michigan.

Tuition: \$1250

This workshop will take us back to one of my favorite places in this country, Michigan's awesome Upper Peninsula, after being away in 2011 for the first time in eleven years. My years of exploring its incredible beauty have led me to consider the fall foliage of the UP to be the finest in the land; and no less an authority than John Shaw agrees with me. We will begin in the western part of the peninsula, and from our base in Baraga we'll explore the Ottawa National Forest and its incredible waters, the amazing Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, Copper Country State Forest, and the outstanding Keweenaw Peninsula with its Brockway Mountain Scenic Drive. Then we'll follow the color eastward as we relocate to Munising the gateway to both Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and Hiawatha National Forest. There, in addition to the wonder of color and light, we'll explore the edges of the Big Lake, Superior, and all of its many compelling places.



We'll focus on the creative aspects of image creation and learning to see. We'll explore light management strategies and techniques. In the classroom we'll discuss our fieldwork in meaningful critiques, and we'll learn workflow techniques in PhotoShop and Lightroom.

For more information call me or write: don@earthsongphotography.com.

October 13 – 19: Acadia NP/Mount Desert Island, Maine Fall Workshop, Southwest Harbor, Maine

Tuition: \$1250

The last workshop of the season takes us to the rocky coast of Maine where Acadia National Park and Mount Desert

Island put on a fall display second to none. Scarlet and orange maples, white-trunked birches and beeches in golden attire, the dark conifers of the northern boreal forest, blueberry bushes on fire, the rocks and waters: this with a backdrop of the mighty Atlantic and its many moods, from Cadillac Mountain to Bass Harbor.

The quaint charm of working fishing villages will draw us in. We'll explore the iconic places and the out-of-the-

way places that make Acadia such an incredibly beautiful treasure.

In our classroom work we'll discuss the art and craft of seeing through sensitive and meaningful critiques, and we'll delve into workflow and post-processing techniques in PhotoShop and Lightroom.

For more information call me or write: don@earthsongphotography.com.

Until next time, may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

This newsletter is being sent only to those people who have expressed an interest in receiving it. If you no longer want it, you can get off the mailing list by sending an email requesting removal to don@earthsongphotography.com.



Sunrise, Purchase Knob, Great Smoky Mountains National Park