

**A Song for the Asking**  
**The Electronic Newsletter of**  
**EarthSong Photography**  
**and**  
**EarthSong Photography Workshops: Walking in Beauty**

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## **Hello to All:**

### **Feeling Our Way: The Conscious Lives of Critters**

There was increasingly compelling evidence that we are not alone in the universe, not the only creatures with minds capable of solving problems, capable of love and hate, joy and sorrow, fear and despair. Certainly we are not the only animals to experience pain and suffering. In other words, there is no sharp line between the human animal and the rest of the animal kingdom. It is a blurred line, and becoming more so all the time.

**Jane Goodall**

from the Foreword to *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (**Marc Becoff**)

“In the old days the beasts, birds, fishes, insects, and plants could all talk, and they and the people lived together in peace and friendship. But as time went on the people increased so rapidly that their settlements spread over the whole earth, and the poor animals found themselves beginning to be cramped for room. This was bad enough, but to make it worse Man invented bows, knives, blowguns, spears, and hooks, and began to slaughter the larger animals, birds, and fishes for their flesh or their skins, while the smaller creatures, such as the frogs and worms, were crushed or trodden upon without thought, out of pure carelessness or contempt. So the animals resolved to consult upon measures for their common safety....” Thus begins the Tsalagi story



### **Snails at Work**

of the origin of disease and medicine as told to the esteemed ethnologist, **James Mooney** by **Ayunini**, Swimmer, the great story-teller shaman of the Post-Removal

period among the Eastern Band. It is not an isolated tale. Stories of the intelligence and rich emotional lives of all beings, especially, but not exclusive of, the more complexly organized species, abound throughout the traditional peoples of the world.



As the Christian world holds the words and teachings of the Bible to be absolute and factual beyond doubt, so traditional peoples across the arc of time have held the wisdom teachings passed down by the elders to be the same; and in the richness of that tradition, animals and plants are seen not as subservient to or created for domination by Man, but rather as co-equal beings inhabiting the same material world. You may consider the one to be irreproachable and the other old-fashioned and allegorical at best, but my caution would be that you not reach that conclusion too facilyly.

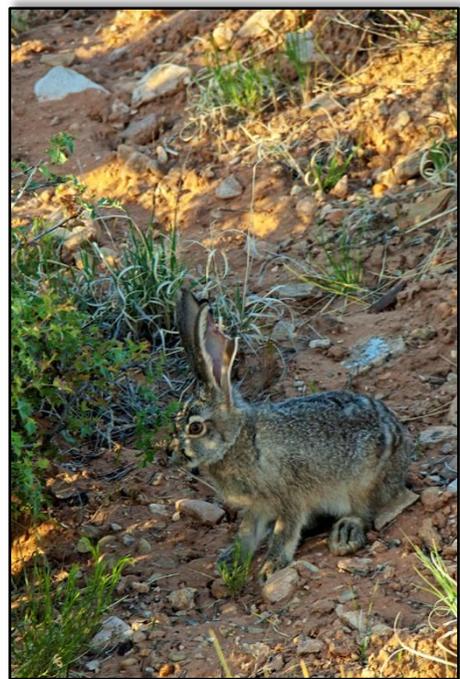
As I am reasonably certain, by now most of you have discerned that organized religion is not my strong suit; and I would not wish to have you think otherwise about me. Just as quickly, I would add that, for me, life is nothing if it is not a spiritual journey, and I would hasten to say that somewhere around the age of eight or nine, I cast my lot with the traditionals and have never seriously considered rethinking along different lines.

**A Bloodroot Unfurls** no expert, of all of the world's spiritual traditions and to uphold the belief that there is value and wisdom in all of them which can be available to anyone who will set aside the prejudices with which most groups tend to imbue their members and simply listen without judgment to what others have to say about themselves and the ways in which they view the world around them.

As **Barry Lopez** expressed in *Of Wolves and Men*, "The range of the human mind, the scale and depth of the metaphors the mind is capable of manufacturing as it grapples with the universe stand in stunning contrast to the belief that there is only one reality, which is man's, or worse, that only one culture among the many on earth possesses the truth." That is about as succinct and precise a personal credo as I can imagine.

There are, of course, many realities: the Lakota Sioux's is one, the Tsalagi's is another, and Christian America's is still another; but in an increasingly fundamentalist world many legitimate voices face the on-going threat of being drowned out and lost, and

I consider myself to be a student, though certainly



**Out of Sight, Out of Mind**

among them the voices of the animals with whom we share the resources of the planet and the native cultures that see in those fellow creatures kinship rather than separation. For as we are increasingly learning and being shown in an astonishing variety of ways, the animals around us also have voices, and it appears to be our ignorance, as opposed to our intelligence, that prevents us from hearing them.

“I am thinking, therefore I exist; I’m reasonably sure you aren’t thinking, and therefore you probably don’t, at least in conscious terms.” Those may not have been his exact words – all of them anyway – but they fairly well follow the gist of what he espoused; and what he espoused has had what amounts to the greatest impact on the way the western mind has thought about animals for the past three hundred and sixty-five years: a view that continues to this very day. He, as you have discerned, is the great seventeenth-century French philosopher and mathematician, **René Descartes**.



### **See Me, I’m Thinking about You**

Monsieur Descartes expressed it as his considered opinion that animals are nothing, more or less, than fleshy machines possessed with what he described as a “reflex” which allows them to be both sensate and perceptive, but not conscious.



### **The Triangle Eternal**

So just how was it that le bon Mssr. Descartes came to be on such uncertain terms with the non-human creatures of the planet? René Descartes was a devout Catholic, and thus a devout Christian; and while Christians can war with each other over many things, they never war with each other over the souls of animals, being in general agreement that animals don’t have souls and therefore cannot be conscious. This follows from the Christian interpretation of the Aristotelian “Great Chain of Being” as nature’s scale of existence from the lowest of creatures to the highest – being Man and none else. Only Man has a soul, and therefore only Man can be conscious; and that has, pretty much, been that since Descartes clarified it for us.

Descartes supported and practiced vivisection, the act of nailing living animals to boards and then cutting them open so that their internal systems could be observed and studied in order to better answer physiological questions appurtenant to mankind. His conclusion – animals are merely mechanical entities – justified in his mind the killing

and eating of them as well. Let me quickly add here that I am not a vegetarian, but my rationale for being an omnivore has nothing to do with the want of animal emotional life, intelligence, or consciousness.



### Who's That Trespassing in My Barn?

right.

As these ideas became more rigid, they gelled around a particular notion known as anthropomorphism: the propriety, or lack thereof, of using human characteristics to describe the non-human, or said in a slightly different way, ascribing to non-humans characteristics we associate with being human – until eventually the separation was, for all practical purposes, complete: animals were neither conscious, nor emotional, nor did they suffer or possess qualities that gave them standing to expect moral consideration.

In that completeness, the “behaviorists” – **B.F. Skinner**, and his disciples and the other reductionists who followed his line of reasoning – appeared to have won the day for the notion that all behavior – animal and human – is simple stimulus-response, which is to say “observable action-reaction” and nothing more. I would be remiss if I failed to mention at this point the actual founder of that school of psychology known as behaviorism, **J.B. Watson**, who in 1913 assembled the conclusions of such luminaries as **Ivan Pavlov**, **Edward Thorndike**, and other researchers into the Behaviorist canon (my term). Legends still afloat in the realm of Madison Avenue ascribe to Watson the founding of the concept of the “brand name” from his many years with the advertising giant, **J. Walter Thompson**. The behaviorists saw themselves as scientists; and, for them, the scientific study of animals required reliability, objectivity, and repeatability – the sine qua non cornerstones of investigation: mechanical in extremis you might say.



### Consciously Headin' South

Over the course of the Twentieth Century, behaviorism mellowed slightly into **E.O. Wilson's** sociobiology in which concepts of animal mind, consciousness, and behavior



continued their slide toward a unified and extreme materialistic perspective, eventually clothing themselves in a new label, “evolutionary biology,” in which all aspects of both behavior and culture can be described in terms of “genetic inheritance” derived over millennia of natural selection, and “learned behavior” absorbed into our brains and reinforced through repeated circumstance, both in human and animal experience. I have, of course, greatly oversimplified all of the complex theorization that has been folded into this; but, hopefully, it suffices as a snapshot of reality.

Here, however, I believe a line has to be drawn. I love science as much as anybody and I believe in the scientific method; but I also believe in wonder and awe, and yes, even in magic; but when my belief in science says I have to reduce the world to its most abstract material terms; to believe that only that which can be counted and repeated is real; that what cannot be observed does not exist, that the mind is nothing more than what the brain does; and what

**Is Anybody Home?**  
the brain does is nothing more than the task of an elegant, immensely complex, carbon-based supercomputer, then it's time to stop and re-examine.

As **George Page**, the celebrated host of the longest-running natural history television program of all time, the PBS series *Nature*, put it, “It is undoubtedly true that a great deal of animal and human behavior is unconscious information processing of some sort;” even as he then proceeded to spend the balance of his excellent, *Inside the Animal Mind*, examination into that behavior countering the broader application of that conclusion as an absolute truism. There is, as Page asserted, “more to animal behavior than just instinct and conditioned learning. There is, at the very least, extensive memory and cognition.” And it may well turn out to be that as our learning curve arcs forward in time, our knowledge curve may well bend backward to a moment when we – the living citizens of the planet – looked at each other and recognized a kindred spirit living within. How anthropomorphic is that?

I can describe it only as fortunate for all of us that over the past half-century there has been a growing reaction in rebuttal of the behaviorist's point of view. Consider the observation of **Dr. Jerry Garcia**, an experimental psychologist writing in the *American Psychologist* journal regarding his own application of anthropomorphism in his work to predict animal behavior “because this works better than most learning theories. I could rationalize this heresy by pointing to our common neurosensory systems or to convergent evolutionary forces. But, in truth, I merely put myself in the animal's place.”

At the forefront of this “cognitive revolution” has been the work of **Donald Griffin (1915-2003)**, the Harvard Professor of Zoology whose seminal work on bat orientation

and navigation led to his term “critical anthropomorphism” to describe the work of the new breed of cognitive ethologists, who, like himself, see intelligence, emotion, and awareness looking from behind the eyes of our fellow beings. Griffin was the first to describe the “echolocation” mechanics and behaviors of those leathery-winged creatures that fill the night skies with tiny ultrasonic sounds that guide their flight around objects and to their sources of food. While he conceded that getting to the place where we might understand what it’s like to be a bat might be a herculean task, he was steadfast in his belief that we might nonetheless come to know a great deal more about the *umwelt* (the total sensory world for any specific animal) of these creatures than we might suspect. His volumes *Animal Thinking*; *Animal Minds*; and *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness* are considered groundbreaking explorations.

Prior to Griffin’s death he would have been the first to declare that for all of his work, his views might yet be considered the minority opinion. He clearly understood that while the behaviorists had come down from their pedestal to acknowledge that there might be some basic level of awareness present in our animal friends, for which the term “cognition” would be appropriate; they were staunchly unwilling to concede that such cognition would rise to the level of *conscious* thinking.

Just so that we can share a common understanding of both ends of the elephant, let’s consider that “cognition” comprises “processes by which sensory input is transformed, reduced, and elaborated.” Closely related is “thinking” which is seen as “attending to the animal’s internal mental images or representations.” The ethological distinction is that cognition describes a process without consciousness, while thinking steps over that line. On the far side of this line, *Cognitive Ethology* says that “an animal may be considered to experience a simple level of ‘consciousness’ if it subjectively thinks about objects and events,” which is to say only if there is something that it feels like to be that particular animal. To be sure, as Daniel Dennett expresses in *Consciousness Explained*, “...We can join Donald Griffin in avowing the consciousness of an animal without being able to describe its nature in full detail.”

We humans enjoy a world in which we experience both cognition and consciousness; and in that world the twain seems as one, but since we do not yet know the *umwelt* of the individual creatures that share our world, we cannot yet say if it is possible to be a bat with cognition and yet without consciousness; or even if the bat, in fact, experiences them in some way analogous to what we experience, but in a way that we cannot presently fathom or perceive.

If cognition and consciousness are equivalents then the matter is settled; but then, again, if it were possible to perceive with the senses and to act on those perceptions, and yet be unconscious of those actions – in other words, cognition without consciousness –



**Bee Very Still, Spot**

what then? And what if there is some form of consciousness that stops short of being self-consciousness?

We humans seem to intuitively draw a line between those creatures whom we believe manifest consciousness and those who do not; but where exactly that line occurs is different among different segments of the human population. There is some level of sophistication/intelligence which we somehow intuit can be shown, even if we are not in alignment with where that level appears. For many of us, that line might well be drawn above the level of, say, honeybees; yet when we look at the complexity of the waggle dance as a means of organized communication, it is perhaps difficult to claim that it is merely instinctual, and not learned and therefore conscious.

A caveat here might well be that mere complexity does not a priori amount to consciousness, or even cognition; and it is always wise to keep in mind the Law of Parsimony, which we know as Ockham's Razor, and which reminds us that, in all scientific investigation, priority must be given to the simplest possible explanation.

A couple of years ago I was photographing the elk herd in Cataloochee Valley in the Smokies in late September. I've read a little of the ethology of these animals, and I knew that during the run-up to the rut, elk bulls engage in a practice designed specifically for the purpose of making themselves appear as formidable as possible to their potential rivals, the other bulls. They have been known to wallow in mud and excrement or any other foul-smelling substance, and generally do anything they can to become fierce in the eyes of their opponents. They obviously have learned to see this as an advantage in securing a harem of cows for mating.



**Can't See Me, I'm So Bad**

In a corner of the small lot next to the hay barn near the entrance to the valley there were several younger bulls that, as I evaluated them, were all about a year-or-so away from being serious contenders for a harem of any size. This fact did not seem to deter them from posturing, at least with each other, which was exactly what they were doing as I stopped to catch their antics.

As I watched, one from the group, who was obviously quite aware of his actions, walked over to a pile of hay lying on the ground. The hay was in a low-lying area where enough water had drained into the depression to soak it into clumps that strung together. Lowering his rack into the straw, the young bull made several tosses until he had a sizeable quantity of matted strands covering his head and interwoven among his antlers. Then he proceeded to literally strut toward his companions as if to say, "That's right, I'm bad." They, of course, ignored him totally. Imagine, in that moment of observation, thinking, "I wonder what it's like to be that elk, 'cause it's like something."

I mentioned earlier that I am not a vegetarian. My reasoning is based on two threads, one merely of convenience and the other spiritual: the basic fact of life, as I see it, is that

all living things, except the very simplest forms at the bottom link of the food chain and the plants (save for the exceptional carnivores like the pitcher plants), must consume other living things in order to sustain themselves. No way around it as far as I know.

As I also believe that all life is precious, I am thus compelled to be grateful for each bite of food I take, to show gratitude for the living beings whose lives have been taken so that mine can be sustained; and this would be true regardless of the nature of that life.



### **Sheep on a Rock**

sleuthed for us the most accurate explanation of the nature of such things.

Our roots go deep into the Pleistocene (which began about 2 million years ago and concluded with the most recent melting of the extended glacial ice some 10,000 years ago) where we found ourselves living by foraging for anything we could hunt or gather – a little road kill was a fine thing, too – as long ago as 200,000 years before the present; and it is literally true that our brains evolved in the way they did as an outgrowth of the hunting experience; but more than the act of stalking and killing, the hunt evolved into a truly sophisticated ritual, a dance in which the actions of hunter and hunted escalated the consciousness of both until those actions became instinctive for each. As a species, we became hunters by nature; and hunting took on a spiritual aura and context that our brains simply have not yet grown beyond – and perhaps never will. Our evolutionary changes over the past ten thousand years have not given us nearly long enough to alter two million years of becoming who we are.

I appreciate the Taoist masters who have been willing to carry the logic of the sacredness of all life to the extent of living without harming any animal life at all, and I applaud and bow to their humanity. My own perspective is still informed my traditionalist spiritual outlook that says the other animals and I have come through the millennia together, they understanding their role to offer themselves as sustenance for me, and me required to be grateful and respectful of their willingness to sacrifice.

Recently I had the opportunity to see the documentary film on the life and career of one my favorite living photographers, **Sebastião Salgado**, entitled *The Salt of the Earth*. Salgado is one of the most perceptive and sensitive artists I have ever encountered, who in spite of the obvious depth of his feeling for humankind made a career of being a social documentarian, placing himself repeatedly in those locations in which man's inhumanity to man seemed to reach its blackest levels: Rwanda, the Sahel,

and Bosnia, to name some names. He spent so much time immersed in these horrific situations that he literally developed a malady of the spirit – a physiological sickness touched off by intense negative emotional experience of bearing witness to so much violence.

His only remedy was to alter the trajectory of his life's path. He changed from a social documentarian to a nature/landscape photographer, and he returned to the farm in Brazil where he had grown up. Though ravaged by years of neglect, he worked with his family to return that land to the rainforest it had once been; and in this effort he and his wife **Lelia** have succeeded. It is now a Brazilian national park; home to flocks of birds.

In his work to create a magnum opus of images of traditional peoples who have managed to avoid the killing stomp of modern society, as well as to explore the regenerative power of the natural world, he traveled again to Africa, among other things, to walk among the mountain gorillas. His portraits of these gentle creatures reveal a thoughtfulness and a wisdom in them that seems so starkly at odds with the destruction in his earlier projects emphasizing the footprint of mankind as he has spread “progress” across the globe.

Looking at these familial animals, more precisely, watching them look back at the camera, challenges my quest to think about animal intelligence and emotion and to say with any real feeling who is the more “evolved.” My jury is still out on that question.

In the Tsalagi story, the animals all began, each with its own kind, to council how they might respond to the threat raised by man's lack of concern and callous treatment, and thus were diseases and maladies of all kinds introduced into the world. It was only the plants, who, learning what the animals were up to, came together and devised an antidote. Each plant would create a remedy for one disease that the animals had created and would, if a human made a request in an act of humility, share its secret. So medicine was created, and mankind was able to survive.

The creatures that share our world are possessed of a wisdom that we have only begun to appreciate in our quest to dominate. We would be wise to approach their knowledge with unpretentiousness, even reverence; for their lives are ancient beacons and reminders of what we ourselves have been, and the path they light for us may be the grace note in our journey toward a new morning.

## What's Now...?

### **And Then It Leapt**

In the beginning there was no fire, and the world was cold, until the Thunders (Ani-Hyuntikwalaski), who lived up in Galunlati sent their lightning and put fire in the bottom of a hollow sycamore tree which grew on an island. The animals knew it was there, because they could see the smoke coming out at the top, but they could not get to it on account of the water, so they held a council to decide what to do. This was a long time ago.

**James Mooney** as recorded in  
*Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*

After all of the other animals had either tried and failed to retrieve fire from the sycamore tree on the island, or had come up with excuses why they could not dare the adventure, the little water spider, Kananeski Amaiyehi, said she would undertake to try.

She wove a tusti bowl from the silken threads in her body and fastened it to her back. When she reached the place on the island where the fire was burning she took a tiny ember and placed it in her bowl. Then she returned, bringing fire for everyone to share.



From a cold world to a world of fire in one swift event: that was almost the way it seemed the season of spring began this year.

For the entire week of March 22, the spring had begun to become more and more in evidence. On the heels of the winter we had experienced in the mountains of Western North Carolina, this was a welcomed process, even though it appeared that the season was lagging a little and the new growth had been noticeably delayed.

**A Chilly Beginning**  
Then on March 28 it snowed in the high country and even down into the mid-elevations. The low peaks surrounding Cades Cove were shining white. For a couple of days it seemed that the season was sliding backward; but then on March 31, the temperatures rebounded beyond expectation and have never looked back.

With three weeks of spring still ahead, we seem to have already plowed directly into summer, although that doesn't prevent extreme temperature swings from occurring this late in the season as you travel from higher to lower elevations. On the morning of June 5<sup>th</sup> I encountered 53° at Clingman's Dome and 81° in Little River Gorge about an hour apart. If you are in the Park early or late you still want to be prepared for such extremes.



**Leaping Head-on into Spring**  
With the season running ahead of itself as far as it is, the early ephemerals have vanished and the flowering shrubs are coming in. The Catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) in the middle elevations have flowered and gone and the few Catawbas in the high country that bloomed this year are blooming now. The mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) are peaking in the lower elevations along the streams and they are blooming strongly in the higher reaches. For the record, the laurels are about 3-4 days from peaking along the section of the Blue Ridge Parkway between Richland Balsam and Balsam Gap. They are about 4-5 days from peaking between Balsam Gap and Water Rock Knob, and in a weird twist of timing, they are peaking now in Soco Gap.

There are also quite a few flame azalea (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) blooming on the last section of the Parkway between Soco Gap and MM 469.

This is a banner year, it seems, for all flowering species, and the buttercups



(*Ranunculus hispidus*) are no exception. There are huge patches of these colorful little flowers all along Clingman's Dome Road and in many other disturbed areas where sunlight is abundant. There are still numerous clusters of thyme-leaved bluets along Clingman's Dome Road; and, although they are past peak, there are numerous bluebead lily (*Clintonia borealis*) blooming in the high country along Clingman's Dome Road and on the Appalachian Trail east of

### **Here's Butter in Your Cup**

Newfound Gap.

Within the next two-three weeks I expect to see purple-fringed orchids (*Platanthera psychodes*) blooming along the road to the Dome and on US 441 along Thomas Divide. During that time, the Rosebay rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) will be blooming in the lower and middle elevations, especially along the Smokies' streams. By the end of June the three-lobed Black-eyed Susan will be coming into the meadows of Cades Cove, and several other Asteraceae species will be in evidence throughout the Park as well.

While it's a little early to try to predict with certainty how the climate will impact the later summer wildflowers this year, it seems reasonable at the moment to say that many of these will appear early than usual and this will likely be true of such species as the later Asteraceae, the Monarda, and the summer orchids.

Although with the coming of July, the Smokies enter the "dry" season of the year, the next month is a good time for early morning fog to be present across the mountains.



### **Clingman's Dome Peek-a-Boo**

Typically on the heels of late-afternoon thunderstorms, the temperature overnight cools enough to bring condensation to the lower air layers in the form of ground fog. These early-morning mists are wonderful photographic opportunities especially in places like Cades Cove, Clingman's Dome, Morton Overlook, and Thomas Divide.

The water levels in Smokies' streams begin to become lower with the advent of

summer, which can present a new world of image possibilities. Boulders and other rock outcrops commonly submerged offer new elements to combine with the water itself. Of course, the energetic force of the water changes dramatically, so you must decide how you wish to express this element. It may be that watching the weather and planning to come after a storm is more in line with what you wish to accomplish; so thinking and planning are always significant parts of any Smokies photographic experience, especially when it comes to summer and streams.



**Rushing Headlong into a Sink**

Sunrise and sunset opportunities in the Park change dramatically with the advent of summer. Sunrise from Luftee Overlook

is now something that will not allow for the inclusion of the rising ball. Of course, it can still be wonderful for early morning light and great atmospherics, early or late. Sunrise from Clingman’s Dome, even though the ball is far to the left at the east end of the parking lot, can be wonderful in summer. There are lots of potential foreground elements and always the possibility of early fog. Late afternoon from the Dome can be an amazing experience of late light, but this is not the time of year to be thinking



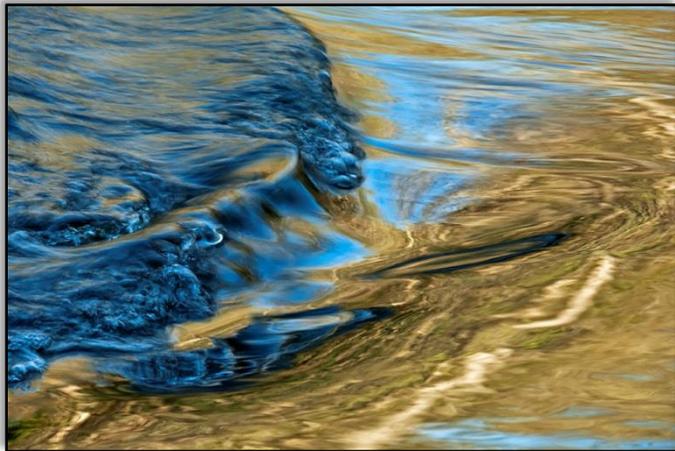
**Sunrise under the Dome**

“sunset” from this location. From now until early-September the view from Morton Overlook is one of the quintessential sunset opportunities in the country. At this moment the ball is dropping below the horizon nearly straight down the valley of Walker Camp/West Prong. By the solstice, it will have climbed part-way up the ridges on valley right and then will begin its return journey across to Sugarland Mountain where it will drop from view in the weeks before the autumnal equinox.

Date:	<u>June 1</u>	<u>June 21</u>	<u>July 1</u>	<u>July 15</u>	<u>August 1</u>	<u>August 15</u>	<u>August 31</u>
Sunrise:	6:19 a.m.	6:18 a.m.	6:21 a.m.	6:29 a.m.	6:41 a.m.	6:52 a.m.	7:04 a.m.
Sunset:	8:43 p.m.	8:52 p.m.	8:53 p.m.	8:49 p.m.	8:38 p.m.	8:24 p.m.	8:03 p.m.

All times are for the Oconaluftee Visitor Center. Times at the locations will vary by several minutes. Consult The Photographer’s Ephemeris for actual sunrise/sunset times at your specific location. Daylight Savings/Summer time is in effect for the entire period of these times.

Wildlife in the Smokies in the summer months can offer excellent opportunities. The deer in Cades Cove are eating, raising their fawns, and practicing for the rut to arrive in



autumn. The wild turkeys and their chicks (poults) can be seen feeding in their rush to grow strong for the winter ahead. Coyotes are often spotted looking for an opportunistic meal. Songbirds are everywhere. In the streams and moist places salamanders can often be found. Summer is the time of abundant life on the move. And of course there are the bears. Cades Cove is usually the best location to find these magnificent creatures, often looking to make a meal of

### **The Abstraction of Water**

whatever they can forage.

Over in Cataloochee Valley the elk mothers have brought their calves down from the high country; and the valley at dawn and late afternoon is the perfect place to spot them. But there is also a small herd that is permanent in the Oconaluftee Valley around the visitor center, so consider each place as an opportunity to work with these great animals.

It is true that the respiration of all the plants of the great forest quite often renders the air of summer in the Smokies a palpable veneer of haze; and while that makes some opportunities more challenging, it enhances others, making photography in the Park during these months a very interesting blend of mundane and beautiful. For my money, the beautiful has always had the upper hand.

The mountains tell us stories, and because we listen to them they become a part of who we are. They become a part of memory, and from memory they are carried to others. In some way every story of these mountains is a story about the land. Ultimately everything returns to a story that is about the land; for in the end all that remains is the land and from the land the virtues arise: humility, wisdom, respect, and honor, and courage. These begin with the land and blow through us like the wind until we are one. All my relations.

## **A Tip is Worth...?**

### **The Courage to Create**

We must replace fear and chauvinism, hate, timidity and apathy which flow in our national spinal column, with courage, sensitivity, perseverance and, I even dare say, "love." And by love I mean that condition in the human spirit so profound it encourages us to develop courage. It is said that courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue with consistency.

Maya Angelou  
*Even the Stars Look Lonesome*

At the Y.M.C. A. in Athens, Georgia where I was privileged to attend between the ages

of six and twelve, I had the opportunity to be exposed to some of the most wonderful teachings and instruction I could ever imagine. I have written of several of my more meaningful experiences at the “Y” on the pages of this newsletter; but something I may have neglected to mention is the notebook I created there when I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade. With **Kelley’s** guidance, all of the boys in my class took a simple presentation binder and filled it with pages of stories and allegorical sayings, each containing some wise instruction for a boy growing to manhood. It is now fifty-eight years on, and I still have that notebook. One of the quotes from one of those mimeographed pages is attributed to none other than “The Wise Old Owl” and it says, “Courage does not mean there is no fear. It means that fear has been conquered.”



### **Clouds Just Keep on Rollin’**

We all know that fear – as with all of the primary emotions: anger, disgust, happiness, sadness, and surprise – is with us from the day we are born until the day we die.

All of these emotions can be, and often are, involved in some way with the creative



### **How to Read a Wave**

otherwise, is merely one of them. To die from a failure of being creative can be just as numbing and just as eternal; and the fear that drives our unwillingness to face it is just as great a demon as if it were a monster with a bloody blade in its hand.

Our creativity is the spark that tells us we are beings possessed of feeling; it is the voice of our connection to the universe of which we are part; it is the expression of our inner desire to find our potential, to be of service, and to make a contribution. Our creativity is the outward manifestation of the impulse to know that we are, in fact, alive.

Courage, fear, and creativity: like an eternal triangle; how can we embrace the one to

process, some in very positive ways; but of all of them the greatest impediment to that process is, by far, the emotion of fear.

In this culture we have become so jaded to so many realities. We seem to have forgotten the advice of the Diné grandfather, “Fear is a demon. He will kill you if he can;” and if we consider it at all, we think of it as a quaint allegory devoid of reality and meaning. Is it really? Death may come in many forms and the physical demise of the body through painfully inflicted means, or

deny the other to enhance the third? In his seminal work on the topic, *The Courage to Create*, the noted psychologist, **Rollo May**, laid out four separate types of courage. Three of those: physical, moral, and social are elemental to our growth and development as members of a society.



The fourth – creative courage – is the most significant in terms of our understanding of who we are as individuals. For it is this courage that addresses our ability to risk what is known and familiar so that we can find new solutions and inspired answers in our search for genuine expression. For “known and familiar” we might well substitute “safe and secure.” Creative courage is what provides the matrix in which we discover our truest selves.

It is through the lens of creative courage that we see our way into what we fear, into the self-defeating noise of our internal dialogues, and beyond into the clarity of what is real, what is accurate and true.

We are, after all, here to learn and to grow; and while we can choose to do nothing and remain safe and secure, we know that doing something exposes

**Somewhere...** us to the risk of suffering. To grow is to occasionally suffer; but if we approach that distress and anguish with humility, and choose to see it as a part of our creative practice, then we can begin to discern the truth of any situation and the understanding that comes from knowing that truth, which will lead us forward into a new awareness and new understanding.

So far this is sounding like a discourse in the psychology of personal endeavor, and you might well ask what any of it has the slightest to do with photography. Think for a moment of your own photography comfort zone. What do you do really well? Do you understand exposure flat out? Do you ace composition, processing? Do you “see” macro, abstract, or intimate landscapes with ease? What are your photographic challenges? What do you struggle to accomplish; what are your greatest shortcomings as a photographer? Do you even bother to try to discover them, to understand them, to work to overcome them? Has the computer become your tool of convenience for dealing with anything difficult? Does all of this have a little more relevance? Does it now appear that your photographic creativity often requires the application of courage to overcome fear?

If we were to attempt to describe the primary characteristics of this creative courage, how might we proceed? Perhaps in this vein:

1. **A Belief in Oneself:** Of all the faces in our interior portrait gallery, which “self” do we mean? After all, one of those characters has to take the lead for anything to be accomplished. By now we know at least most of those profiles and we ultimately have to select one of them to be the marshalling force, keeping in mind all of the tricks that the ego has at its disposal. The chosen self should be one that can quietly observe the turmoil around it and move forward with a clear sense of

who he/she is and where he/she wants to go. The capacity to believe in oneself comes from our deepest sense of humility, from our on-going search for self-knowledge, from a willingness to remove the masks that hide us from ourselves, and from an attitude of acceptance of who we are. As with most worthwhile knowing, it begins with the acknowledgement of our ignorance. Alfred Stieglitz observed that, "To see means to know that one does not know, yet not to be ignorant. And then to act in the light of one's knowledge." To know oneself requires an irrepressible desire to learn; to believe in oneself requires a deep acceptance of not-knowing, yet knowing clearly that we can be knowledgeable.

2. An **Unbending Intent**: Time to cop an attitude, because intent follows from it. Intent is both directive and generative, that is, it creates as well as orchestrates; and the flower that grows from it is *will*. Will is energy, and as such it has the power to change our lives and to change our world. When we exercise intent, we form a path that holds a vision, we promise ourselves to grow toward it, we express a desire we wish to fulfill, and we walk toward it. Of course, there are factors way beyond our control, but we do everything we can to move forward and in that movement to seek to uncover all that is possible within us. In those gifted moments when we are fully awake to this process, we see with clarity the road far ahead, as well as the ruts immediately in front of us; and in these moments we can see to continue for the long run, as well as to make whatever adjustments in the course may better serve our present "now." We can see the distractions that arise and find our way through, or around, them. What we begin to recognize is the perseverance that we have within us that will help us continue until we have realized that overarching aim which was our beginning.
3. Becoming **Open to the Mystery**: **Richard Bach** once wrote, "Though I cannot see it with my eyes, I trust that the current knows where it is going...." To have the faith that there is a greater plan than I can usually discern; to open myself to the awareness of this mysterious force, is an indispensable part of creative courage. Ultimately this awareness brings me somewhere between *intent* and *surrender*; and in moments of clarity I can sense an elegant order and unseen forces beyond my knowing that offer guidance and understanding. To be sure, the ego wants to be in charge at any cost and will employ any number of tricks to achieve what it wants; but its deviousness can be seen for what it is, and as my awareness gives greater substance to my courage, my capacity to ignore the voice of the ego grows, allowing me to strive toward a larger perspective, toward the blossoming of a conscience that encourages me to place my trust in something greater still and to believe in the existence of something magical.
4. **Seeking to Live Within**: As **David Ulrich** writes, "We have misplaced key ingredients of the creative process: the ability to inhabit the body, discovering its rich source of sensitivity and intelligence; the capacity to awaken the subtle intimations of our feeling nature, opening to empathy and compassion; and the quest to nourish the mind through the discipline of objectivity and impartiality, seeing things from many angles without the distorting lenses of our judgments

and opinions.” In order to be fully creative it is essential that we be able to focus on ourselves and our work at hand through attention and concentration, yet we live in a world that constantly and increasingly strives to pull us away from ourselves in every direction it can. That which is absolutely necessary – the capacity for attentiveness – is the thing that we have most lost. Our world sells self-esteem at the expense of the challenge of learning. These are not happy or cheerful things to say, but I believe they are unreservedly true; and I believe the acknowledgement of their truth is the essential first step in a different direction. We cannot ignore the outer world, but neither can we be fully creative if we stay constantly in that external realm, for our responses to the world are formed from within. It is the intersection of those two worlds – the outer and the inner – where the creative response is formed. The resonation of these two is sent outward in the form of our acts and deeds.

5. **Cultivating Compassion:** In order to be fully creative, we must be fully feeling; we must channel our seeing through the sensitivity of our heart so that we can discover our interconnectedness with the entire world, all of its forms and all of its life. Through compassion we learn to fully accept ourselves and to fully accept others. This acceptance arises from a deep humility that allows us to acknowledge the three primary aspects of the creative process: our own growth as an individual; our obligation to help others on their journey, and our desire to make a contribution to the world we live in. It is our compassion that leads us to an empathetic relationship with each of these aspects, all at the same time. We gain an awareness of the elegant order that is one side of a coin on whose reverse is the unbearable contradiction of its opposite; the dualities at the core of existence. The Dali Lama has said that the greatest obstacle to our awareness is self-centeredness and it is through our compassionate understanding of the oneness of all things that our creative courage can clearly be seen.

Being human has never been a simple matter. That has been the case throughout our evolution as a species and our history as a culture; and the world in which we live does not seem to be moving in the direction of making it any easier. The outer world seems constantly poised to pull us completely away from ourselves, and we seem constantly on the verge of allowing ourselves to be so pulled. For many the solution is a numbing flight onto inattention and non-feeling.

The same could be said of being a creative soul, when so many forces conspire to make creativity so infinitely simple that it seems to lose its meaning, and simultaneously so thoroughly technical that it seems to lose its sentience.



### **Mabry There's Been a Shake-up**

The courage to create carries with it a keen awareness that sometimes we might just as soon wish to not see, but turning away will not solve the difficulties we face, nor will it make us feel better for ignoring what we refuse to see. Creativity is our gift to ourselves and to the world, but perhaps even more accurately, it is the expression of our obligation to that world for giving us the opportunity to be a part of it. Our courage to go forward, to look with the wisdom that comes with understanding, and to see with compassion will always make a difference, both to ourselves and to others.

## **EarthSong/How You See the Land Really Matters** **Walking in Beauty**

“I want to thank you for a magnificent week... of community and photography. On a scale of 1 to 10 the time I spent thinking and working and sharing was a 12! I’m looking forward to my next workshop with you.”

Pat C  
Northhampton, Massachusetts

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**

There are many reasons to give yourself (or someone else) the experience of a photography workshop. Think for a moment about your own photographic experiences, especially the ones that took you away from home for two days or even longer, a week, say. Think of all of the planning and preparation it took to get you out of the house and on your way. Think of the research you did: the conversations you had with knowledgeable people familiar with where you wanted to go; the books you read and the maps you studied and the sunrise/sunset charts you examined and the routes you structured to maximize your opportunities; the clothing details and weather details you became familiar with; the lodging and meal considerations you had to make. Think of the time you spent



**The American Pharaoh of Waterfalls**

trying to familiarize yourself with the place itself, the land – the geology and geography, the flora and fauna, what makes it interesting and notable, what makes it memorable and special, what makes it imminently photographable, what it means to create connection with this place.

Now think for a moment about having someone do all of those things for you so that when you arrive in that place all you need to consider is which side of your bed to sleep on, and all you have to do is go out your motel door ready to be creative and inspired by the beauty around you.

Think a little further of having someone who knows and can explain to you the technical aspects of photography as well as the creative intricacies of art and craft, who is a student of the photographic process and because of this, an excellent teacher as well.

What I do, and have been doing for well over a decade, is all of that so that all you have to do is think creative thoughts and be inspired by what you see.

If all of what I have just described sounds like a pretty fair deal, then I invite you to join Bonnie and me somewhere during the remainder of the year for one of our amazing adventures. Here's where we're headed:

We have started a tradition of doing a mid-summer workshop in the Southern Highlands, which we have called "Wildflowers, Waterfalls, and Western North Carolina" because it's located in Transylvania County, North Carolina, the Land of Waterfalls, and it also features the mid-to-late summer wildflowers of DuPont State Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The tradition continues.

**August 14-16, 2015;**  
**Wildflowers, Waterfalls, and**  
**Western North Carolina Workshop;**  
**Brevard, NC;**  
**Participants: 8;**  
**Tuition: \$350**

I don't think anyone has ever seriously challenged the claim of Transylvania County, North Carolina to be the "Land of Waterfalls." When the movie producers were looking of the best location to show the journey of **Hawkeye** in **James Fenimore Cooper's** epic, *Last of the*

*Mohicans*, they chose Triple Falls. When I think of summer wildflowers in abundance, I think of the Blue Ridge Parkway as it winds its way along the northern boundary of this lovely county on its way to the Smokies. Some of the most enticing high-elevation Scenery anywhere is found along that same road as it tops out on Richland Balsam, the



### **Appalachian Amazement**



### **Hawkeye's Run**

highest point along the entire Parkway. This workshop is instruction, fieldwork, and critique all in one fun-filled weekend.

Contact: [don@EarthSongPhotography.com](mailto:don@EarthSongPhotography.com); (828) 788-0687

Did someone say “September?” It must be time for a barn workshop. The first September barn workshop we did was great fun. The weather was perfect and the barns put on quite a show; so we thought we’d offer another one. Except this time we’ve added a day, which can only make the whole experience better.

**September 10-13, 2015;**

**The Appalachian Barn – Cusp of Autumn Workshop;**

**Asheville and Madison/Haywood**

**County, NC;**

**Participants: 8**

**Tuition: \$425**

By the time this workshop begins I will have scouted quite a few additional structures that were not available during the first year of these events. So even if you attended one of the earlier adventures, the barns you will see here will probably be completely different. My friend, **Taylor Barnhill**, has been busy adding new structures to the Barn Alliance’s lists, and we’ll keep adding them to ours. With the addition of the second full day to the workshop, we’ll also build in a second critique session. I can’t say we’ll have twice as much fun as with the originals. That might be impossible; but we’ll have more fun than ruby slippers on a return trip from Oz.



**Barn Dance Anyone?**

Contact: [don@EarthSongPhotography.com](mailto:don@EarthSongPhotography.com); (828) 788-0687.

**Now here’s something to really set off some fireworks for you.** It’s actually a double event, but it can also be considered as two very separate and distinct happenings.



Over the past three years I have had the chance to spend quite a bit of time in the Desert Southwest, particularly in Northwestern New Mexico and Southern Utah. I have long felt a strong attraction for the immense beauty of this amazing part of our country and have immersed myself in it whenever I could. For instance, I spent nearly the entire month of May in these areas, exploring the lesser known back roads and out-of-the-way spots, as well as the more iconic locations. I have now put together back-to-back weeklong tours, which can be taken together, or separately:

**October 17-23, 2015;**  
**The Awesome Canyon Country of**  
**Southeastern Utah;**  
**Moab, UT;**  
**Participants: 7;**  
**Tuition: \$1500**



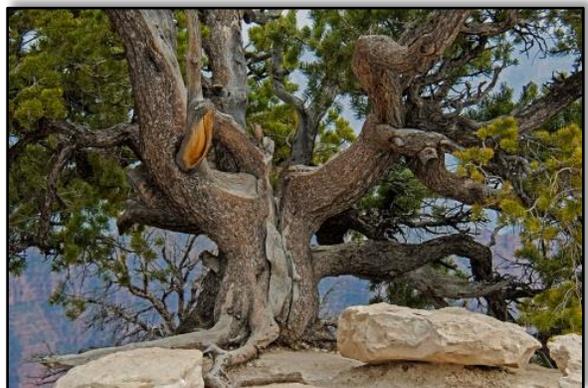
**Ode to a Dead Horse**

**October 26-November 1, 2015;**  
**The Heart of the Desert Wild;**  
**Kanab, UT;**  
**Participants: 7;**  
**Tuition: \$1500**



**Up the Grand Staircase**

**October 17-23 and October 26-**  
**November 1, 2015;**  
**Both Tours Together;**  
**Moab and Kanab, UT;**  
**Participants: 7;**  
**Tuition: \$2500**



**Not in Brooklyn**

Now, here's the macaroni and cheese of the thing: I will drive from Asheville and will be leaving on October 10th. If anyone wishes to meet me in Amarillo, TX, on October 11th and continue the journey to Moab over the following six days, for a special tuition of **\$400**, I'll share my adventure across northwestern New Mexico that will also include time in Palo Dura Canyon, TX; Taos, NM (2 days); Chaco Canyon, NM (1 ½ days); Hovenweep National Monument, UT (½ day), and anywhere else we decide to linger.

Of course, Bonnie and I will have made all the necessary arrangements such as lodging along the way and the best places to share meals as we travel. One caveat: you will definitely need a 4-wheel drive vehicle for either of these adventures. We will also have made the arrangements for our time in Moab and Kanab. We will be glad to help with making connections with other participants to facilitate traveling.

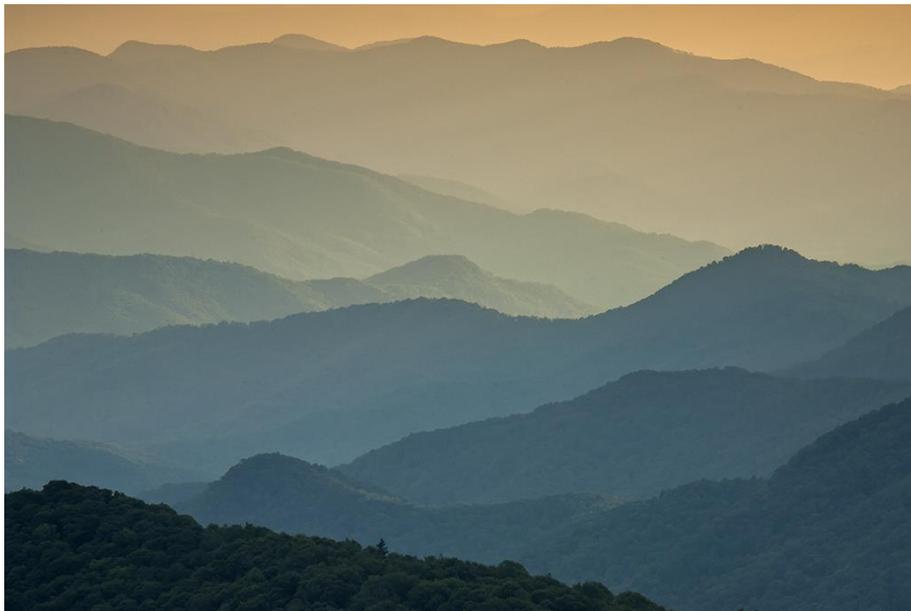
**Your expenses will be your tuition, lodging, all travel expenses, meals, and entrance fees to public lands requiring an admission fee. I will be your guide and will offer in-the-field coaching/instruction, and in-the-field critiques of your work.**

This is an incredible opportunity to spend one week, two weeks, or nearly three (3) weeks photographing in some of the most amazing geology on Earth; and I'll share with you the many secrets I've learned from years of research and months of presence on this sacred ground.

Contact: [don@EarthSongPhotography.com](mailto:don@EarthSongPhotography.com); **(828) 788-0687**

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

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**Late Light, Cowee Mountains Overlook Blue Ridge Parkway**