

SKIPJACK

ARTS
LETTERS
REVIEW

A journal of arts, environment, and spiritual currents



Featuring
Jo Van Arkel
Sara Burge
Dave Malone

Interview
Jon E. Zawislak

Bugs Issue

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Bugs

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ARTS
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From the Editors...

The world is trying to change. It wants to.

Feel it in the air, winter retreating. Longer days, warmer nights.

Today, the first flies emerged. It's odd watching them relearn their name-sake, little dive-bombers dropping like—well, you know: flies. So eager to live, they risk it all for this time in the sun, never mind tonight's winter weather advisory. And yet, here in the sun, I can't blame them.

Kurt Vonnegut famously posited that there are actually six seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn, Locking, Winter, and Unlocking.

Let us unlock. Let us begin again.

- Em, M, Jim



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Jon Zawislak, assistant professor of Apiculture and Urban Entomology at University of Arkansas





Red Back

CJ Emerson

I searched through lilies
and last year's leaves, hungry,
tracking the scent of those before me,
for the place where ants dangle.
I must dance as I enter, snipping
and winding up her work, marking
my intentions, slowly inching,
until tapping toe to toe, she stills.
Legs open, I vibrate, wrapping her
head to toe in silk before giving
the treasure I've held since birth.
Tumbling back towards her mouth
I give my body, sharp kiss spreads
warm numbness, embolus locking
in the next generation until melting,
all turns dark, and I am forever hers.



Three buttermilk butterflies

Ann Howells

abruptly bump
careen
reverse
bump again:
 inscribe errant arcs
 ricochet
limber wings
lethargic
 from nighttime chill
 still flit
like palsied petals
 always oblique
 and perpendicular
never
 the shortest distance
 a Klee mobile
spinning and darting
 on unpredictable breeze
Buttercup
Trillium
Phlox
 drawn to vibrancy
 pink gaudier than bronze
or perhaps they choose
 by scent
Gardenia

Lavender
Lemon verbena
 some pheromone link --
plump pistil
 downy anther
 petal lip
erotic
like O'Keefe
 or do they move
to inner riffs bridges
fumble blind
 for some enduring truth
aflutter with simple joy
 this sultry August afternoon
this
 indifferent summer



The Silverfish

Ann Howells

first appears on page 17,
zips straight up the margin
into space between spine
and binding – so darn speedy.
There again, page 23,
my finger in hot pursuit –
but she is faster
by a hundredth of a second,
cuts her teeth – if she has teeth –
on Spenser, digests Plato,
grows plump on philosophy
she'll never comprehend.
She deposits gelatinous eggs
beneath endpapers.
Oh, my books! My books!
I'm buried in student loans,
ready to hock my laptop
for cyanide if my thesis is rejected.
Still, I set aside research
to stab at her one final time,
and leave a tiny smudge,
like scale from a butterfly,
silver iridescence on page 63.



Scattered

Gloria Heffernan

Even then, I was always the first one up,
moving through the dark apartment on tiptoe
past the couch where my mother slept.
I learned early on
to reach into the bathroom
and flick the light switch on and off
before stepping onto the cool white floor.
From the other side of the threshold
I would watch the frantic scattering
as dozens of roaches startled by the sudden glare,
ran for cover under the claw foot tub
or behind the white wicker hamper
or between the slats of the oddly ornate radiator
my mother had spray-painted silver
to cover the cracks and rust.
Only then would I enter,
navigating gingerly across the octagonal tiles,
glancing at the mirror over the sink
where a straggler skittered across my face
on its way across the glass.

The Demise of the Caelifera Family

Karen Burton

As an admirer of Buddhism, I was conflicted. If a moth in my kitchen flings itself against a light fixture, mistaking it for starlight, I will grab a stool, capture it gently, and return it to the night—because all life is sacred.

Yet, I stood at my grill on a Tuesday, thick ribeye steaks on a ceramic plate. I chose to repress the knowledge that this steak was once a mooing, cud-chewing creature. I did not allow that it once had four hooves and a face. It was, simply, dinner.

I lit the three burners of my Super Weber and the gas exploded into flame with a delightful whoosh! Like Pavlov's dog, I salivated at the sound of my suburban dinner bell.

Pop. I started out of my reverie. Pop.

The gas line? I knelt to check the gauge. Pop. Snap. Pop. Pop. Level with my forehead. Pa-pop. Snap. Pop-pop-pop-pop.

I jumped to my feet, fearing a severe grill malfunction. Pop-Snap! Pop-pop-snap-pop. What the hell?

A large grasshopper flew up from the bowels of the grill, landing on the inside of the still cool lid. I looked down—dozens of small grasshoppers covered the bottom of the Super Weber, dots of gray and green. They were exploding like popcorn.

Snap. Crackle. Pop. Grasshopper Krispies. Horrified, I waved my tongs at Papa Caelifera. “Run away!” I screamed. “You’re going to burn.” I tried to chase him to the edge of the lid, but he would not flee. “GET OUT!”

Apparently, grasshoppers do not speak English.

Snap. Pop. Crackle. He dove between the slats of the grill straight into the heat.

After a few stray pops, the massacre was over. Tongs still in hand, I stood stunned on the now silent deck. There, in a moment of existential crisis, I wrestled with the mass murder I had committed.

Then, it dawned on me: Why didn’t I just turn off the burners?

I shrugged and threw the first steak on the now-hot grill, wondering if roasted grasshoppers would affect its flavor.





Art by *CJ Emerson*

Ode to the Hummingbird Moth

Marianne Gambaro

Bane of my garden, horned emerald monsters
strike harvests at the height of promise,
devour eggplant and tomato,
though themselves often consumed

by ravenous spawn of braconid wasp.
Survivors sleep in Hades' fertile soil
awaiting sweet Persephone's return
to emerge transformed.

Transparent wings throb in fuchsia
butterfly bush and salmon milkweed.
Sirius' sun emblazons carmine bands
on segmented torso like some flying velvet lobster.

Who am I to destroy
such a splendid creation?



Opens

Ed Ruzicka

It is after
its blink
in the full spread
of diaphanous
Wings
that the butterfly
opens
a glory
Almost as ripe
as yours
my love
on sheets
Together
In the dark.

Cleansed

after Blake

Within the gyre
of a squadron
of dragonflies
Inside the whirring
Constellation
they wove
For one
seized instant
I saw
through
all their
diamond-faceted
Lenses
Multiple worlds.



Habitat

Judi Mae Huck

A pipevine swallowtail
limps on the pavement
Second-graders gather, captivated
“It’s dying because someone stepped on it!”
one shouts,
they stoop and crouch
to bear innocent witness
Wispy legs drag a body
across pebbled pavers
“He’s gonna be alright,” says
a preschooler’s dad,
“he’s just having a hard time.”
The toddler squeezes his father’s hand,
speechless
Wings burnt-blue, still beating
limbs curl into fetal position

The Woman Who Loved Insects

Kathryn Silver-Hajo

If a wasp gets trapped inside and Zulaika finds it scrabbling against the window, tail end tucked toward the glass as if it could sting its way out, she cups it and releases it, watches it seize its freedom with a powerful launch of its wings.

She powders the baseboards with cinnamon to divert armies of ants. And though spiders aren't technically insects, she loves them too. She'll coax them onto a travel brochure, send them cruising out the window, willowy threads of silk trailing behind like lifelines.

It doesn't matter how many ewws, screams or horrified looks she's endured from siblings, roommates, and friends, she quietly releases each trapped creature as if it's her own kin.

When Zulaika was twelve, her aunt and uncle were babysitting her, watching TV, when her aunt said she was going out to get ice cream—mocha because it was Zulaika's favorite. Her uncle smelled of stale sweat and beer when he pulled her close to him on the sofa, slid his clammy hand along her thigh, said, *Atta girl, give us a nice hug.* Snug as a bug in a rug, eh? She held perfectly still when she saw a centipede shimmy along the sofa back and onto his arm, stinging him on the soft inside part of his elbow, making him bellow like he'd been hit by a shotgun blast. He stomped on the thing, beat it with a sofa cushion until all fifty thousand or so legs stopped moving.

Another time she was tossing an artfully folded note to her best friend, Alex, at the exact moment Mrs. Allison turned back from the blackboard. The teacher grabbed a ruler, headed towards Zulaika. Just then a bee flew in and stung Mrs. A in the space between thumb and forefinger that held the measuring-device-turned-weapon which skittered across the lacquered floor as Mrs. A sucked the soft flesh and ran out of the classroom, the doomed bee dropping to the ground.

Years later, Zulaika was walking back to her dorm room after dark, clutching her purse that contained five hundred dollars in cash she'd been saving up for two years to go on spring-break to Florida with her roomies. She remembers scents of frying onions and weed co-mingling in the cool autumn air of the quad when a man leapt from behind the science building, grabbed her bag with one hand and with the other waved a knife that glinted in the moonlight. He hissed, keep your



fucking mouth shut which she did as she watched a giant moth—perhaps attracted by the knife’s reflected light—hurtle into his eye and stick there. He dropped both knife and purse, and she fled, screaming He has a weapon! Get him! her words ricocheting across the quad, causing a chain reaction of windows flying open, lights going on, someone pulling an alarm in one of the buildings.

Zulaika loves the flying, crawling things most people loathe or fear. Beetles and braconids, termites and tarantulas, hornets and harvester ants, crickets and cockroaches, fire ants and flies, sow bugs and cicadas, all pals. And whenever she sees a centipede she nods appreciatively, hustles it back to the cool damp of the basement. She’s planted a bounty of bee-balm and wildflowers in her little urban garden, and always leaves the porch light on for whoever might seek refuge in its glow.

Woodstove

Nicole Chvatal

The methodology for his laundry
still makes me laugh and cringe and laugh again
that I am no longer faced with the mounds
of heavy denim, wool river drivers
with seed-sized burn holes and necklines fraying,
air-drying from every door jamb like long
beans on the vine, even during summer
the fire going. First I ate it up
like caterpillar, what are these odd ways,
who exactly fills the pockets of his
flannels? I, hungry, curiously felt
at home in his cocoon, butterfly with
wings not clipped just retracted for winter.
There is no warmth quite like that of woodstove.



Treading Water

Victoria Crawford

Drowning, Beetle treads water
thrashing six legs
in the chlorinated pool

I cup my hands below
his desperation
slowly raising him

It is the Sixth Extinction
life in a dwindling time
salvation a possibility

My choice
his choice
he plods homeward through grass

Flickers

Sharp pine splices twilight air
transition hillside—grassland and forest
between doubt and disguise
meadow and woodland
a whisper of adolescence:
Daddy's girl
Male fireflies flash dance
for bored ladies
alchemical seduction
fluorescing phosphorus songs
Dad shows me how to catch one
it doesn't burn at all,
but glows
against my hands.
I open my palms to freedom
Daddy holds my hand
on the way home
in the twilight



Satisfaction

Sara Burge

Air in late July is lecherous,
licks our skin until
we're wet with desire.
Bees throng the sunflowers,
flashing their fat little asses.
Mosquitos flock to the rind of us
while air clings
like a child who refuses
all pleas for solitude.
Strange white bugs
chew at the garden's offerings
until every last hope lies limp.
We slap the mosquito's body
against our own. She bursts
into blood and communion.



Crickets Provide Sex Advice

Will Falk

Horny Jerusalem crickets
beat their bodies on hollow ground
to hit on each other.

Entomologists explain that the crickets
listen through their bellies
pressed into the soil.
They only date the best drummers
and only fall in love
with someone who skillfully
fills the silence in their empty guts.

Listening to a cricket's
percussive seduction
after rolling in the soil,
on a hot and sweaty night,
with you,

I think of the rhythm we just shared
and become sad
because the entomologists also say
that insect habitat degradation
is leading to population collapse.

Concrete and asphalt, of course,
are bad for flirting,
are too dense for drumming,
and interfere with the crickets'
pick-up line transmissions.

It's hard to mate, it seems,
when you cannot communicate.
That makes sense to me
because I know
what we've been doing
would not work on blacktop.

You pull me closer
to drive away the hard realities
of being alive right now
with the tenderness of your touch.

We pick up again where we left off,
striving to create songs together
worthy of the crickets.

Our music crescendos.
The divisions between us,
the crickets, and the dirt
finally blur.

Then, my head rests on your chest
and only the rhythm
of our beating hearts remain.
They say: protect the Earth,
you cannot make love without Her.



The Hive

Jo Van Arkel

The bees saved her. She woke up one morning and there they were, swarmed on the front headlight of her small white pickup. Sally road her bike to work that day instead of driving, not sure what to do about a bee swarm on her car—but maybe if she left them alone they would collect themselves and move on to wherever bees go to set up their honey shops. She knew they were dying off—cell phones or insecticides or space rays or something like that. So she felt obliged to respect their role as pollinators.

She told people at work—Harry, who worked the phones next to her. They sold Paradise packages for a timeshare in Florida. Between calls, she would raise up in her chair and peek over the wall of her cubicle.

“What do I do with a bee swarm?”

“A fan,” said Harry, not looking up from his call list.

“What?”

“If you’re warm, get a fan.”

“Swarm. Not warm. I have a bee swarm on my truck.”

“Really?” said Harry. “That’s very cool. That’s a once in a lifetime thing.”

A voice rose up from the cubicle on the other side. “You should do something about that.” It was Trish. She was a know-it-all and also the number one seller on their team. Plus she had big beautiful brown eyes. Definitely hard to be around. “Call a beekeeper. They’ll come get the Queen.” Right at that moment, the Shift Manager Yolanda walked by. Everybody called her Yo, but not to her face. People got busy then and there wasn’t any more talk about the bees, but at the end of the shift, Trish dropped a list of beekeepers on her desk. Trish could multi-task. She could make her calls and research area beekeepers at the same time. She was probably next in line for Shift Manager after Yo.

About the same time the bees came, Sally was heading for her own personal collapse. Before Christmas, she and her boyfriend had drifted away from one another. It was as if the ultraviolet rays of love had stopped drawing them together. One day, she came home from work to find a note on the kitchen counter. “I’m leaving,” it said. “We both know it has been over for a while.” She looked around their apartment and saw that everything of his was gone. He was a minimalist, so packing up and leaving was not hard to do. Perhaps she should have seen



this as a red flag.

At work she pretended like they were still together. When people went out for drinks at the end of the day, she said she had to get home because her boyfriend was waiting. All this time she could have been making friends, but instead she was in her apartment watching old Star Trek episodes and eating take out. Then the bees came and swarmed her car, and she knew she had to do something. She was responsible for them. It was like the universe was calling to her. “Come out here and save these bees!”

When she got home, she called all the numbers on the list. Each time she dialed a number, her call went straight to voicemail and each one had the same message: “If you are calling about bees, we are not collecting now. Thanks and save the bees!” When she came to the last number on the list, she was almost ready to give up.

“Hello?” A man answered. He had a low voice, the kind of voice that would have been good on the radio.

“Hi,” she said. “A friend gave me your name. I have bees on my car headlight. Like hundreds hanging there. I haven’t been able to drive to work. My friend said you pick up bees and find a new home for them.”

There was a pause. “I have been getting lots of calls,” he said. “I don’t really need more bees.”

She hadn’t considered this. That bee people might not be interested in collecting her bee swarm. “They—they’re not going off on their own. Can you please just come by and look?” She was embarrassed to realize she was pleading and sounded a little desperate.

She heard a sigh, then a shuffling sound, then “Okay, give me your address.”

“Can you come tonight?” she said. She felt an urgency. Like the bees were somehow related to her boyfriend dumping her, and she just wanted to get on with everything. He agreed to meet her later that afternoon.

Sally was waiting outside at the designated time when a man in a small truck pulled up, parked and got out. He was lean and young and good looking. Sally didn’t know what to expect when it came to beekeepers, but she honestly didn’t imagine a hottie.

“The first thing we have to do is find the queen,” he said. He knelt down in front of her car and studied the swarm. “There,” he said after a few moments. He was looking at the front fender. “See her? She right on the edge of the bumper.”

And there at the center of a cluster of especially attentive bees, was the queen. “You have to capture the queen first,” he said. “The rest of the bees just follow.” He went to the back of the truck and pulled out a box. “You can almost scoop them up with your hands!” he said, smiling.

That is what she wanted after all. Someone who cared about the bees.

As these stories go, Sally and the beekeeper are supposed to fall in love. And they did have a nice moment, capturing the bees and loading up in the truck so the bees might establish a new hive. Sally was grateful and really glad to have her car back. But after they collected the bees, they said goodbye and never saw each other again. Sally would eventually meet a guy who would stick around long enough for them to build a home together. But that's a different story.

Here's how this one ends. The next day, when Sally went into work, Trish was waiting by her desk.

"Well," she said. "Did you call the numbers I gave you?"

"Yes," said Sally. "Thanks. Thanks for your help."

"I worried about them all night," Trish said. Her body visibly relaxed. "Did you know that bees take naps together in flowers. And they dance to communicate? They do a bee dance."

A few hours later, Sally went to lunch with Trish and told her all about capturing the bees with the bee guy. They became friends that day and stayed friends for the rest of their lives.

And that's its own kind of love story.



One is silver and the other is gold

Tricia Knoll

So true of fireflies' glow
on summer nights – spotlights
of luciferase broadcast who needs
a mate, flash code of dot and dash
to make new friends
and seek the old.

Eastern Tiger Swallowtail

Dave Malone

A cow-beating rain stopped
in mid-afternoon when I parked
the car sixty miles from home
at a fuel station.

On the pavement, the black
and yellow butterfly lay sideways,
fluttering when my door slammed,
and I bent down to see

if there was anything I could do.
Its neck bent, like the favorite
side of a pencil eraser, so I
took the creature into cupped hands,

and we climbed into the car
where I peeled an apple
and placed the swallowtail
against the wet flesh,

its paper wings quiet,
decorated in black moons
and striped highways,
while I drove ahead and hoped.



Good Use for a Book of Poems

Dave Malone

It's August in the Ozarks.
On my deck the gnats buzz
their plans to one another
to party in my pint.

With my thumb I save
a few from the endless fete
of hops then smack the rest
into eternity with a copy
of Charles Bukowski.

Jon Zawislak

An Interview with the assistant professor of
Apiculture and Urban Entomology





For this special, Bugs-themed issue of Skipjack Review, we set out on a quest to have a heart to heart with an Ozarks entomology expert. But where to start? We're happy to report that there are a surprisingly many incredible humans up to some fascinating and niche studies and discoveries in the realm of bugs, many of which directly affect our own world more than we know. It's unsettling how experiences we depend on but know nothing about shape our very lives. Too often, life goes on and we're none the wiser. Not today!

Without further ado, here's our interview with Dr. Jon Zawislak, a man out standing in his field playing with bees.

Jon, you've written about agricultural pesticide use in the southern United States, the extensiveness of pesticide contamination in honey bee diets, and general honey bee hive management practices. These are very specific and fascinating inclinations, conversation we're glad to know people are having. What is it about bees that first caught your interest?

My first introduction to honey bees was a horrible experience. When I was young, our neighbors had some bee hives. One of their kids wanted to show me the hives up close, and I remember immediately getting stung several times. I quickly ran off, wondering why anyone would ever want to keep bees on purpose. Years later, just out of college, I took a summer job as a technician in an entomology lab. That turned into about eight years working for that professor, during which I helped with a lot of research projects and learned a lot about insects. I was also introduced to honey bees again, and I became hooked. They are fascinating. Bees have their own complex society, with language and culture. They plan for the future. They respond intelligently to their environment, and can adapt resourcefully to changes in their surroundings or respond quickly to perceived threats. Honey bees have been both feared and revered by people since prehistory. They provide us with unique products (honey and beeswax) – which author Hattie Ellis calls “sweetness and light.” They have also been used as weapons of war, described by Jeffery Lockwood in his book Six Legged Soldiers. I guess it was gradual... there was no single epiphany moment when I fell in love with bees, but the more I learn about them, the more I want to learn. And when I decided to get a masters degree, I chose the bees to work with. I was just about out of school again when all the headlines began predicting gloom and doom for bees, and the end of the world as we know it without pollinators. Suddenly everyone wanted to study bees, but I was a couple of years ahead of the curve. There was a new job opening with the UA Cooperative Extension Service for a honey bee specialist. Talk about being in the right place at the right time with exactly the right credentials!



In the parlance of our times and the Almighty Google, the way we seek and even process information has changed. Interestingly, with the fastest internet connections ever literally at our fingertips, the sky, thus, the limit, people appear to be less interested in the world around them than ever. We know, say, that bees are good—that they perform some service, so to speak. We know what pollination is, at least conceptually. But what else do we know? Can you tell us a little bit about the importance of honey bee education?

Pollination is by far the most important service that bees provide. It's been estimated that insect pollination adds more than \$30 billion to the U.S. economy every year by improving the quantity and the quality of crop yields... fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds. And honey bees – just one species out of about 20,000 types of bees – do the vast majority of that pollination work on many important crops. They are the only species that we can manage on the scale necessary to meet the needs of modern agriculture.

Bees also provide us with honey. This was just about the only sweetener humans had for most of history, until widespread cultivation of sugarcane began. Even though there are many sweeteners available now, honey remains special. There is no one single flavor of honey. Every batch of honey is a blend of the nectar from millions of flowers. It takes on the flavor and aroma of the place it's produced... what a wine aficionado would call terroir. Fresh raw honey is as complex as it is delightful. Think of it as the distilled essence of a field of wildflowers. It doesn't need to be processed or pasteurized; it's pure and naturally antiseptic straight from the bee hive.

Beeswax, too, has long been a valuable commodity. It was used in candle making, or course, but also many other traditional industries as a lubricant, for waterproofing, for casting metal objects, and making wood and leather polishes. It has a high melting point compared to many synthetic waxes, so pure beeswax can be made into tall tapered candles. Most of the scented candles you see are poured into jars because they are made with inferior waxes that have a much lower melting point. Beeswax was traditionally used to hold the reeds in place inside of accordions. So, you know, no polka music without honey bees! A lot of beeswax today goes into pharmaceuticals because it's nontoxic, although it has no nutritional value. Pollen itself can be another valuable commodity. Besides spreading these minuscule particles from flower to flower, bees collect a lot of it for their own use. Pollen is high in carbohydrates and lipids, as well as proteins,

amino acids, vitamins and other nutrients. It's got everything a growing bee needs, and the colony needs a lot of pollen to keep making more bees. Many people consume pollen as a dietary supplement or seek out locally collected pollen for relief from seasonal allergies.

One of the fiction pieces in this anthology involves bees. Specifically, a swarm of bees displays rather odd behavior. Over the years, I've read that bees have personalities, for lack of a better word. What can you tell us about the behavior patterns of bees?

I suppose you could say that bees have personalities. However, any bee you happen to meet outside the hive has, at most, a couple of weeks to live. The likelihood you will encounter and interact with the same bee more than once is pretty slim if you aren't a beekeeper yourself. Having worked with many colonies of bees over the years, I can definitely say that the colony unit tends to have its own personality. Any beekeeper will agree that some colonies can be less pleasant to work with than others. Some colonies simply tend to be more defensive – I don't like to use the word aggressive – towards the ways we interact with them in their home, which they might naturally perceive as a threat to their families. Bees respond to their environment, but there is also a genetic component to their behaviors. Nature versus nurture, as they say. And if you replace the queen bee, within about a month the personality of the colony will usually change, as the genetics of the queen's offspring shift. Sometimes for the better, but there are no guarantees.



We are all storytellers. From the moment we wake up in the morning, we tell ourselves and others stories. Sometimes the story is a romance. Sometimes it's a story about revenge. Often, it's a suspense. When looking back over the chapters of our journey through this ever-changing world, usually we can pinpoint moments when our lives changed course. More often than not, these changes are marked by dark moments of realization that shock us to the core. Was there ever a moment in your research about the effects of pesticides on the environment, whether in the classroom or out in the field, when you discovered something that began to define your research thereafter?

I started looking at the effects of pesticides on bees in response to the prevailing popular idea that a single class of insecticides, called neonicotinoids, were the sole (or most important) cause of what was called CCD, or colony collapse disorder. This group of chemicals represents the largest slice of pie -- over a quarter of all chemical pesticides sold and used worldwide. Their adoption into agriculture and other uses coincided with the public's awareness of pollinator declines, so it seemed to fit. There were lots of protests around the country in front of big box hardware stores demanding that they stop selling these chemicals in the name of saving the bees. In reality, the amount of neonics sold to consumers is a small drop in the bucket of worldwide use. Demanding that homeowners stop using one class of chemical is not going to reverse this trend. It would only cause the agriculture industry to shift to using other chemicals. The current state of pollinator health reflects the state of overall environmental and landscape health. We are living in the Anthropocene Era, and people have been making the world into a less friendly place for bees and other wildlife in a lot ways for a very long time.

Some of my research looked specifically into pesticide contamination of bees and bee hive products. Honey bees sample the environment all around their hive, and pretty much anything present in it will make its way back to their home. With sophisticated tools you can measure that contamination in beeswax, in honey, in the bees themselves, and in the pollen they collect. Once in the hive, there is no way to tell when or where a specific compound may have come from. But loads of pollen can be sampled easily, directly from bees returning from their flights outside. So pollen is ideal for sampling a specific place at a specific time. We can also determine exactly what plants the bees have been visiting. I conducted a study in the middle of an intensive agricultural area, where more than 80% of the land was under cultivation with a few crops. I collected pollen at regular intervals from multiple bee hives all season long. What I found was that the bees pretty much ignored the crops for most of the season,

concentrating instead on the succession of many “weeds” flowering along the edges of the fields. Except for a few weeks in the late summer when it gets really hot and dry, and irrigated farm fields are about the only thing in bloom, bees took very little pollen from the cultivated fields. This behavior helps to limit the exposure of bees to a lot of the insecticides that farmers may be using on crops. And as for the neonicotinoids that were at the center of the controversy, they were practically absent from any of the samples we took. But what I did discover was high concentrations of herbicides showed up in the pollen samples all season long. They are used to burn down unwanted vegetation prior to planting seeds, and then used repeatedly throughout the season to control weeds. Most herbicides and fungicides are relatively non-toxic to bees, but they can interfere with the complex of beneficial bacteria that live in the bees’ digestive tract, and are important for their health.



All kinds of information is coming to light about the harmful effects of pesticide use, especially in regard to large-scale food production. However, are we seeing any progress in correcting this? Which is to say, is the world seeing—or can we expect to see anytime soon—a responsible response from the biggest culprits?

You can think of herbicide use as a proxy for habitat loss. Where you see the most herbicides being sprayed, you generally will see the lowest abundance and diversity of pollinators. And you can generally follow that pattern up the chain. Where there are fewer pollinators there will be fewer insects and spiders in general, and few birds and other things that feed on invertebrates or on the seeds and berries that pollinators help provide, all the way up to the bigger predators. The exception to this pattern are pest insects. These are the minority of creatures that have evolved to thrive on the one crop that is being grown in a vast quantity, and where many of their natural predators are now in short supply. These same pests have been responding to heavy pressure to become resistant to pesticides over many generations, making them harder to control.

In Europe, where public pressure effectively led to banning the use of neonicotinoids on most flowering crops, populations of pollinators have not dramatically recovered. Insect populations worldwide continue to be in peril. Most published scientific literature agrees that there is no single cause, but multiple interacting factors. And most agree that habitat loss is at the top of that list, with pesticides and pollution below that, and then biological factors (such as pathogens, invasive species). The big picture is complicated. Ecosystems are complicated. All of those factors influence each other. Whenever you have living things interacting, it's nearly impossible to predict all the ways that one part can interact with so many others.

Pesticide use is a low-hanging fruit that people find easy to criticize -- especially people who don't produce anything to eat. As a society we enjoy cheap and plentiful food. We like to have access to tropical produce any time we have a craving... bananas, pineapples, chocolate, coffee... We like being able to eat fresh strawberries in the winter because there is a vast system of production in place to bring them here from thousands of miles away, and burn fossil fuels to do it. If you eat almonds or drink almond milk, you are subsidizing the commercial beekeeping industry, which trucks nearly 2 million hives of bees to California each spring just to pollinate to estimated 80% of the world's almonds that are grown there. Afterwards, bees are moved to other crops, all over the country. No place that produces the large quantities of food we take for granted is able to

maintain vast populations of pollinators needed to produce it. If we want avocados and fresh oranges in the Ozarks, they come to us from California or Florida or even farther. Unless we hunt, gather or grow all our own food within walking distance of our off-grid homesteads, we are all culpable to some degree or other. All we can do is try to limit our individual impacts as best we can.

Our journal aims to highlight art, environmental writing, and spiritual currents from all over the world, but Dorothy Gale was right: There really is no place like home, is there? (And she lived in Kansas!) We at Skipjack camp have a soft place in our hearts for stories about these hills and hollers, poetry of the stillness between autumn and winter and the juxtaposed expectation between winter and spring. And then there's spring and summer: the lushness and green of thriving life, insects galore, a whole wide world reveling in it in its own time. People planting gardens, mowing lawns, making hay while the sun shines. More and more, in the spring and summer, we see the tell-tale series of boxes in people's yards—people raising bees. What advice do you have for people interested in cultivating bees? Anything interesting we haven't touched on?

Beekeeping is great. It's an enjoyable hobby for many people. Bees are fascinating creatures, with a truly alien society all their own. After more than two decades with bees, I can still get lost in wonder by opening up a hive and trying to guess at what's going on in that little world. Keeping bees healthy and productive is like a long road trip. A lot of it is on cruise control – the bees do most of the work for you – but you still have to keep your eye on things and give them a little nudge in one direction or another to keep them pointed in the right direction. Most of the difficult things about keeping bees are seasonal challenges. You have to be ready when mother nature decides it's time. Beekeeping is challenging because it has a steep learning curve to feel like you have a grasp of it. It's a craft, a blend of both science and art. I'm still learning after all these years. I can teach you a lot of the science and biology of bees, but you will still have to get out there and wing it on your own. But for anyone who enjoys a challenge, beekeeping can be very rewarding. I also enjoy things like gardening and woodworking. It's certainly easier to buy produce or furniture in a store, and it's cheap and easy to buy honey. But when you taste your own fresh honey, from your own hives in your own back yard, it's magical! It's like comparing a ripe, juicy homegrown tomato to that tough pink spherical thing you have to settle for in the supermarket this time of year... there's really no comparison at all, right? It's a completely different experience. Once you have had honey warm, right out of the hive, you can't ever go back to store-bought stuff. Consider yourself warned!





Are there any specific articles, writers, or resources you'd like to recommend to our readers for further information on these topics?

The Lives of a Cell was a book that had a profound impact on me. It's a collection of essays by Dr. Lewis Thomas, published in a medical journal in the early 1970s, which touch on a number of subjects, but collectively underscore the interconnectedness of people and our environment, and really everything that is alive. Another book, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* by the entomologist E. O. Wilson explores similar themes, using concepts from natural science to connect many other fields. One of his students at Harvard, Thomas Seeley, also became very influential in the field of beekeeping. His brilliant book *Honeybee Democracy* explores the processes through which a colony of bees divides itself by swarming, then must set forth into the world and, in a few short days, representatives of the group must discover and evaluate potential home sites in distant hollow trees and other cavities, then debate among themselves which is best, and then lead the group to take up residence this space.

The film *My Garden of a Thousand Bees* documents the revelations of filmmaker Martin Dohrn, who explored the diversity of tiny life in his own backyard during the pandemic lockdown, using sophisticated camera equipment and techniques and lots of time of his hands. (<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/my-garden-thousand-bees-about/26263/>)

For those who are interested in keeping honey bees, visit our Extension

website: <http://uaex.uada.edu/bees>. I have a brand new publication called *Beekeeping in Arkansas* that is available for free: <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/publications/pdf/MP577.pdf>.

We also have a complete beekeeping short course online as a series of videos for anyone to watch. These will introduce you to everything you should consider before investing \$1000 in bee hives and equipment, and show you what's involved in the first couple of years of beekeeping: <http://uaex.uada.edu/bee-class>.

For more in-depth exploration of particular subjects, *the Beekeeping Essentials* series by Dr. Larry Connor can be good reads. I have helped to edit and illustrate a number of books he publishes through his company, Wicwas Press (<https://wicwas.com>).

If you still want to help “save the bees” but don’t think you are up to managing honey bee colonies, then just plant more flowers. Gardeners can also cultivate mason bees and leafcutter bees, which are great native pollinators that don’t require excessive care. You can simply provide them with good habitat and nesting sites and let nature take care of her own. There is lots of great information available from the Xerces Society of Invertebrate Conservation (<https://www.xerces.org>) and the Pollinator Partnership (<https://www.pollinator.org>). Locally, check out the resources from the Arkansas Monarch Conservation Partnership (<https://www.arkansasmonarchs.org>) to see how you can help create, improve and conserve habitat for all kinds of pollinators.



A Haiku

Douglas J. Lanzo

the passion
of a nightingale
drowned out by cicadas

Late September

Paulette Guerin

The last cicada is sputtering out.
Probably a male calling for a mate
as autumn moves in. The buzz starts and stops
and pushes forward like an old crank car.
This year, no tidal wave of cicada song
as in the summers of my childhood.
This year, no water and only suburb grass.
The dragonflies have died and the mosquitoes with them.
Then a second cicada answers, tuning its violin
toward the first without breaking a single note.



We can bare anything for a night

Liv H. Scott

For my Brother

We pluck the large ones up,
amazed at their size,
the smallest even
larger than those we trap as kids
in the shallows of the lake
our grandfather summer-weekends us.
Purists, us both, we
have them boiled in only
lemon & butter
Imagine ourselves our kin
who drag bottoms of bayous
for the tiny claws.
who gig frogs, which
we have never tasted.
We do not suck the murk
from the heads, our guts
pampered even if we try
to shuck the pomp of gloves,
feel grit.

We wash our tongues with beer,
divvy up the potatoes boiled
in bag with crawdad.
Poetry is food, or
the other way around
A hard shell to crack,
to peel off, for morsel of flesh,
a claw that open-shuts
at tendon pull.
And in the morning
the cuts on my thumb
prove we can fight
back from the grave.

The inchworm and the buckeye

Fall drops like leaves,
paper craft animation,
all at once, around
the buckeye tree with poison
nuts like little butts in it's bare branches
Fall drops like tea
leaves in water, unfurling,
heady, heavy sinking
down, down, to the bottom of the cup.
An inchworm inching,
toward omen, depression or winter,
both – a cloud blowing wind gust
that you battle,
sketch yourself a medieval rabbit,
the meek inherit – the snail in it's shell
stalls at the buckeye
tree, bad directions,
miles away from
Osage orange- a
perfect feast, or acorn meal. The
dragon-snail gives
up, the book comes
to a close. The
teacup shatters,
rearranges itself
like falling leaves.
The inchworm sleeps.



Authors

Jo Van Arkel publishes stories and poems in a variety of literary magazines. She is a professor of English and Writing at Drury University. She has twice been honored with bee swarms in her side yard habitat!

Sara Burge is the author of *Apocalypse Ranch*, and her poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Willow Springs*, *Prairie Schooner*, *CALYX Journal*, *The Louisville Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *River Styx*, and elsewhere.

Karen W. Burton serves clients as a book coach and developmental editor when not fulfilling her duties as Managing Editor for a small publishing company. Writer of both poetry and prose, her work has appeared in journals and trade magazines in the United States. Recently, her work has appeared in *Rat's Ass Review*, *Panoplyzine*, and *Book of Matches*. She resides in the Midwest and served as editor/contributor for the River Pretty Arts Foundation's new compilation, *Paddle Shots, III*.

Nicole Chvatal writes property deeds and other witty things in Bath, Maine. Her work has appeared in *Popshot Quarterly*, *SWWIM Daily*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Panoply*, *LEON Literary Review*, *The Portland Press Herald* and *Deep Overstock Magazine*. She is a graduate of the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.

Poet **Victoria Crawford** loves to share nature with readers from jungles to beaches to mountains and deserts. She is a Californian, but lives retired currently in northern Thailand. Her poetry has appeared in journals such as the *Woods Reader*, *Califragile*, and *Cargo Literary*.

CJ Emerson is a writer and artist who enjoys all the magic and weirdness the natural world and human experience has to offer.

Will Falk is a biophilic author and attorney. The natural world speaks and Will's work is how he listens. His law practice is devoted to helping Native American tribes protect their ancestral homelands and sacred sites. For the past 3 years, he has led a campaign to stop an open pit mine from destroying sacred Thacker Pass in northern Nevada. His first full-length collection of poetry *When I Set the Sweetgrass Down* was published in April 2023 by Homebound Publications' Wayfarer Books. You can follow his work at willfalk.org.

Marianne Gambaro's poems and essays have been published in print and online journals including *Mudfish*, *CALYX*, *Oberon Poetry Magazine*, *Smithsonian*, and *The Naugatuck River Review*. Her chapbook, *Do NOT Stop for Hitchhikers*, was published by Finishing Line Press. Her career as a journalist is often reflected in the narrative style of her poetry. A committed humane volunteer, she does enrichment with stray and injured cats at her regional animal shelter, socializing them and preparing them for adoption. She lives, writes, and gardens in verdant Western Massachusetts, with her photographer-husband and two feline muses.
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Paulette Guerin lives in Arkansas and teaches writing, literature, and film. Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has appeared in *Best New Poets*, *epiphany*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, and *Carve Magazine*. A suite of 25 poems appears in the anthology *Wild Muse: Ozarks Nature Poetry*. She is the author of *Wading Through Lethe* and the chapbook *Polishing Silver*. Her screenplay, *Irish Rose*, was recently optioned by Cinterra Entertainment. Her website is pauletteguerin.com.

Kathryn Silver-Hajo's work was selected for the 2023 Wigleaf Top 50 Longlist and nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best Small Fictions, and Best American Food Writing. Words in *Atticus Review*, *Craft Literary*, *Emerge Literary*, *Ghost Parachute*, *New Flash Fiction Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Ruby Literary* and other lovely places. Her flash collection *Wolfsong* was published in 2023. Her YA novel *Roots of The Banyan Tree* is forthcoming December 2023. kathrynsilverhajo.com facebook.com/kathrynsilverhajo twitter.com/KSilverHajo instagram.com/kathrynsilverhajo

Gloria Heffernan's *Exploring Poetry of Presence* (Back Porch Productions) won the 2021 CNY Book Award for Nonfiction. She received the 2022 Naugatuck River Review Narrative Poetry Prize. Gloria is the author of the collections *Peregrinatio: Poems for Antarctica* (Kelsay Books), and *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List*, (New York Quarterly Books). Her forthcoming chapbook, *Animal Grace*, was selected for the Keystone Chapbook Series prize. Her work has appeared in over 100 publications including *Poetry of Presence* (vol. 2). She teaches poetry at Syracuse YMCA's Downtown Writers Center. To learn more, visit: www.gloriaheffernan.wordpress.com.

Ann Howell's edited Illya's Honey for eighteen years. Recent books are: *So Long As We Speak Their Names* (Kelsay Books, 2019) and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky* (Assure Press, 2020). Chapbooks include: *Black Crow in Flight*, Editor's Choice in Main Street Rag's 2007 competition and *Softly Beating Wings*, 2017 William D. Barney Chapbook Competition winner (Blackbead Books). Her work appears in many small press and university publications including *Plainsongs*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, and *San Pedro River Review*. Ann is a multiple Pushcart nominee.

Judi Mae "JM" Huck is an arts administrator currently based in Las Vegas, Nevada. She is the Clark County Poet Laureate coordinator and a teaching artist for both literary and visual arts. Follow her on Instagram @banditrl.

Tricia Knoll is a Vermont poet who cultivates many gardens and tends a second-growth woods. She knows insects, admires some. Her poetry appears widely in journals and anthologies and eight collections - the most recent being *The Unknown Daughter*, a chapbook coming out from Finishing Line Press in March, 2024. Her collection about living in Vermont, *Wild Apples*, will be out from Fernwood Press later in 2024. Website: triciaknoll.com

Douglas J. Lanzo is an American poet and novelist whose Newbery-nominated, debut novel, *The Year of the Bear*, won the 2023 Ames Awards for Young Adult Books. Over 360 of Doug's poems have been published in 71 literary journals and anthologies around the world. He and his award-winning haiku poet twin sons enjoy nature, basketball, tennis and hiking. His Author's website is at www.douglaslanzo.com.

Dave Malone holds degrees from Ottawa University and Indiana State University. He is a poet and screenwriter who lives in the Missouri Ozarks, and his most recent poetry book is *Bypass* (Aldrich Press, 2023). He can be found online at davemalone.net or on Instagram @dave.malone.

Ed Ruzicka's most recent book of poems *My Life in Cars* investigates the rocky marriage of desire to the American highway. His next book, *Squalls* (Kelsay Books) is due out early next year. Ed's poems have appeared in the *Atlanta Review*, *Rattle*, *Canary*, *the Xavier Review* and many other literary publications. Ed lives with his wife, Renee, in Baton Rouge, LA.

Liv H. Scott is a St. Louis poet and native. Their poetry has appeared in *Puerto del Sol*, *River River Journal*, and *Crabfat Magazine*. Liv believes in acknowledging joy and learning to sit with the feeling, accepting its comfort and brevity. They wishes to impress upon others the importance of the minutiae-- the first sip of coffee on a brisk morning, the smoothness of a sunflower seed under your tongue, the pleasure of a kiss on the temple.



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