



# La Vista Ecological Learning Center

A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

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## E-News and Eco-spirituality Calendar

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(Our monthly reflections are archived in the Blog on our web site.)

### May's Mystical Music



Photo on Pixabay

Recently I decided to learn a language during this solitary time, and since May exudes an abundance of birdsong, the language of birds seemed like a good choice; besides, birdsong has always allured me with its unique beauty. Beyond having more alone time, three other experiences prompted this idea.

A few weeks ago when I was walking in the nearby Audubon Center at Riverlands, hundreds of red-winged blackbirds were perched in trees sharing their songs exuberantly. After hiking and listening for an hour, I knew their song by heart. As I watched them, I recalled seeing Audubon's 2019 Grand Prize-winning photo of a Red-winged Blackbird by Kathrin Swoboda. What she captured in her unique photo were the "smoke rings" that form from its breath as the bird sings out! What a lovely image of language! You can view her truly remarkable photo on Audubon's web site. (I regret not being able to include it here.)

The next experience was listening to "Birding by Ear" by Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson. This CD audio guide to birdsong identification is a wealth of information. For example, I love mockingbirds and the way they go to the highest point on a tree or house and sing out endlessly, or so it seems. One section of the CD is about "mimics" where I found out that in addition to mockingbirds, other mimics include the brown thrasher and the catbird. In great detail the authors explain how counting song repetitions enables you to determine which of the three is the singer. How wonderful is that? Learning to ID birdsongs has been a gift during these contemplative hermit days.

Another motivation for learning the language of birds came to me recently from Paul Winter, a Grammy Award winning saxophonist and composer known for creating the "earth music" genre. In a recent newsletter he tells a delightful story of hearing a new bird song. His research revealed that it

was a Wood Thrush singing in the key of C major, repeating notes three times. It dawned on him that these were the chords of the first four bars of the opening Prelude of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" which happens to be in the key of C major! Consequently, Paul wrote a marvelous original piece, naming it "The Well-Tempered Wood Thrush". Recordings of the actual birdsong are included throughout. I encourage you to give yourself a real treat and listen to it by searching for "The Well-Tempered Wood Thrush" on You Tube.

A photographer, bird enthusiasts, and a musician have opened the door for me to appreciate the music of Earth in unique ways. Each one revealed the ability to be in communion with our rare and precious planet out of their special talents. Each of them shows a way to live contemplatively, and they call me to deepen my communion. Since true contemplation leads to action I have to wonder if this deeper relationship with the world will make my survival and birds' survival more probable. What do you think? What special sounds have you heard during your solitary time that will help heal our rare and precious planet - and yourself?

## **When to Plant - Another Opportunity to Deepen Communion Monday, May 4**



Kylli Kittus on Unsplash

On this day the Natural Events Calendar tells me to "Plant corn when white oak leaves are the size of a squirrel's ear". That kind of natural wisdom is also music to my ears! As weather patterns continue changing it seems wise to observe nature itself for our planting cues. Why did we ever get away from heeding this kind of advice which

is frequently trivialized as an "old wives' tale", demeaning women as well as the advice. Instead, why not revisit and heed some of these suggestions, using them as an opportunity to continue healing our distance from the living world.

Here are a few more planting prompts found in the Farmer's Almanac:

- Plant lettuce, spinach, peas, broccoli, and cabbage when the lilacs show their first leaves or when daffodils begin to bloom.
- Plant tomatoes, early corn, and peppers when dogwoods are in peak bloom or when day lilies start to bloom.
- Plant cucumbers and squash when lilac flowers fade.

- Start succession plantings of beets and carrots when dandelions are blooming.

- Plant peas when forsythia blooms.

Enjoy acquiring and valuing "natural wisdom".

## Full Flower Moon

Thursday, May 7, All Night



Ganapathy Kumar on Unsplash

Native Americans named this the flower moon for obvious reasons since in May we find ourselves ankle deep in native wildflowers like bird's foot violets, Indian paintbrush, May apples, Shooting stars, wild sweet William, and Jack-in-the-pulpit.

Watching the rising moon is a great solo activity. With your feet in flowers and your eyes gazing upward, enjoy this contemplative celestial festival.

## Workday in the Oblates Nature Preserve

Tuesday, May 12, 9:00 am - Noon

As I write this notice, I am hoping we can gather as a group and go after bush honeysuckle which never practices social distancing. It is coming up in the area where we removed it, and it is time to get after it. If you plan on joining us, call 618-466-5004 to see if we will have the workday. Thanks. You are always welcome to come out and work alone. Let me know if you plan to do that!

## Enjoy Lightning Bugs - Maybe

May 14th Onward

This is the time of year we should begin to enjoy the loveliest of sights, fireflies. However, according to biologists, their numbers are declining all over the world. Will their magic soon be gone forever? Don't just stand by and let this happen! According to *Firefly.org* there are ways to help right in your back yard:

**Install water features** in your garden since they thrive around standing water.

**Allow logs to rot** because fireflies spend up to 95% of their lives in larval stages, living in rotting logs and soil/mud/leaf litter for 1 - 2

years until pupating to become adults.

**Turn your lights off at night** since lights can confuse them when they're trying to mate.

**Refrain from using lawn chemicals** - Duh!

**Plant gardens** which are meccas for fireflies, replacing lost habitat and providing food sources.

**Plant trees**, especially pines which provide two perfect habitats; in the tree and on the ground among the pine needles.

**Don't over-mow** your lawn since they stay mainly on the ground during the day.

**Don't rake leaves and bag them up for the trash** because you are raking up firefly larva and discarding them.

## Save the Date

**Climate Fiction Book Club: *Memory of Water* by Emmi Itaranta  
Postponed until Friday, June 5, 6:30 - 8:30 pm**

It is eerily coincidental that we read *Memory of Water* these past months, for there are so many connections to our present life experience. It is a great read, offering ample food for thought. Please join us at Afterwords Book Store in Edwardsville, IL.

