



La Vista Ecological Learning Center

A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

September, 2021

E-News and Eco-spirituality Calendar

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Monthly reflections are archived in the Blog on the web site.

September

Hornets and Communal Contemplation



Having an appreciation for the beauty of animal architecture, I was excited to learn about an active hornet's nest at La Vista. When I arrived, I was greeted by this scene: a hornet's nest hanging from the tree and the area around cordoned off with three signs, KEEP OUT, NO TRESPASSING, and CAUTION! I was chagrined, and I would have preferred a sign saying, "You are welcome to view the nest safely from here." However, I realize the danger is real. One hornet's nest may contain hundreds of them, and unlike bees, once they sting, they don't die; rather, they can sting over and over and over.

As I walked away from the nest and tried to go on with my day, the image wouldn't leave me, for it spoke loudly to me as a metaphor for our human lives on Earth at this time. We have stirred up a *veritable hornet's nest* and are living with the consequences: the climate crisis, biodiversity annihilation, a never-ending pandemic, and all the implications of each of these *hornets*. Daily, Earth and the whole Earth community get stung over and over in the wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, sea level rise, impoverished ecosystems, virus variants, increasing poverty, racial unrest, and violence. If only we had been more cautious years ago when we were warned. If only, if only, if only.

But we weren't, and here we are. How to live with this anguish? I found guidance for a way forward when I recalled a recent conference **Evolving Consciousness: From Separation to Communion**. Our speaker, Nancy Sylvester, IHM, reminded us that the practice of *communal contemplative prayer* offers us a path into the future because contemplation invites us to shift consciousness, our own and the collective consciousness. It creates the possibility of waking up to our unconscious assumptions, biases and worldviews that created our mess, and it invites us to evolve, making the transition from separation to communion with the Great Mystery and the whole Earth community. This is the consciousness needed for **integral ecology** encouraged by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si*.

You are invited to join hundreds of people from around the country who practice communal contemplation for 20 minutes each morning between 6:00 and 7:30 with the intention of seeking, in the words of Ilia Delio, "new relationships of love that include Earth, all peoples, other religions, all planets and all galaxies." What a

specific way to become grounded daily in an ancient spiritual practice as we live in a hornet's nest that will not pass quickly. I hope you join us. (For guidance on how to do communal contemplation, please visit Nancy Sylvester's web site, Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue)

September 14 Work Day in Oblates Preserve 9:00 – Noon

Join us for our next workday and become a member of this award-winning group!



On August 21st the Friends of the Oblates Nature Preserves, pictured above, received “Volunteers of the Year” award from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield. These faithful workers come monthly from O’Fallon, Waterloo, Edwardsville, Godfrey, Ava, and Elsah Illinois, contributing 930 hours! Since 2015 they have removed populations of 8 different exotic plant species, cleaned up loads of debris after a flood, spent four days removing trash from a ravine, participated in prescribed burns, collected seeds, and removed old fencing. Many thanks to each of them as well as to those who were not able to attend. A special thanks to Debbie Newman who nominated us! She is the motivator behind all our efforts to preserve biodiversity, a necessity for life on Earth!

Pictured L-R: Robert White, Bill Rathmann, Connie Rathmann, IDNR Director Colleen Callahan, ILNP Natural Areas Preservation Specialist and our fearless leader Debbie Newman, Sister Maxine, Sandy Budde, and Bill Zimmerman.
Not pictured: Mike McCarrin, Virginia Woulfe-Beile, Susan Murray, Christine Favilla, Carol Juen, Cheryl

Pictured below for your appreciation – one of the many gorgeous animals we encountered at the Fair.



**September 25 Autumn Equinox and The Heartlands Conservancy
2:00 – 4:00 PM**

Days shorten, nights lengthen, leaves begin to color, and insect choruses start to dwindle. We will honor these seasonal changes by learning about a local organization committed to caring for our common home throughout every season. The Heartland Conservancy *works for clean water, access to the outdoors, healthy ecosystems, and resilient communities in southwestern Illinois*. Gary Huelsmann, who is a Board Member of The Nature Conservancy, will enlighten us about the amazing work of this important organization.

Of course, we will also ritualize the change of season by turning the sun staff! Please wear a mask and bring your own lawn chair and a snack/drink if you wish. It is important to register in case our plans change. To register, email info@lavistaelc.org

**Resource *The Sound of the Sea: Seashells and the Fate of the Oceans*
by Cynthia Barnett**

*“To stare into the spiral top of a whelk or cone shell
is to see the swirl of the Milky Way.”*

Seashells have been around for 800 million years. In her book Barnett shares their history as well as fascinating stories of those who have loved them. In the telling she evokes wonder and awe as well as a sense of responsibility towards them and our all-important oceans in our time of climate crisis. Don't miss this opportunity to be informed and challenged in a most entertaining way.


