

Appreciation of Nature

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“Do you ever wish that we lived in a society that ate insects?” I said to Erin as we were clearing trails. It was a weird question to ask my fellow intern, but part of me has always wished that the average American respected insects the way that we respect all of the livestock that we currently eat. We look at insects and think disgusting pests and then look at cows, sheep, and pigs and think beautiful creatures. Part of the reason for this disjunct thought is that we as a culture view nature and society as two different things. Nature is gross and full of diseases while Society has nicely groomed dogs and animals raised in captivity.

For so long the picture of society and nature as separate entities has prevailed, but there is substantial connectedness in between the two worlds. People see the good nature as their backyard birds and the bad nature as the mosquitoes and beetles that are nuisances. The exact same people created the term weed to get rid of ugly native plants and then introduced invasive to our country because they were pretty. The thing is that birds don't just exist because of our want to see them. The ugly plants feed the gross bugs that feed the pretty birds, but that concept is not widely understood when it should be. A perfect example of this connection would be one that Mitch Robinson, Conservation Education Manager at SPAC, has told many times.

Screwworms used to be prevalent in the Southern United States. That was until they were eradicated through the use of sterile-male technique. Spaced release of sexually sterilized screwworm flies in adequate numbers to overwhelm the native populations assure that the flies would not survive. They were eradicated mainly due to the fact that the flies preyed upon livestock, making ranching in Texas slightly difficult. As soon as they were wiped out, the native deer population had a boom. The deer had previously been preyed upon and with no other fly to whittle down their numbers, their population exploded. This caused all sort of chaos in the societies around the deer as well as the ecosystems. People just didn't realize that flies were connected to more than their livestock and that is a problem that we as a society should try to fix.

Although I talk about people having a problem with how they view wildlife. I am not an exception. I grew up hating spiders, daddy long-legs (harvestmen), and any other creepy crawlies that you can think of. I know that I have a problem and every day I work at fixing it. I went from immediately killing wolf spiders that I saw on the ground to feeling an orb weaver crawling on me and moving it to a nearby plant all in one summer. Spiders are dire in the wildlife communities where they prey on the insects that people complain about daily, yet people find them repulsive and want to kill them if they are too close to them. If everyone put work into educating themselves about the things they fear or find repulsive, the wildlife that surrounds us would be much better off. I still am not great at viewing insects and spiders the way I should. It seems to be that any time I have handled something before, I am rid of the prejudice I had before. I may be able to hold orb weavers, but that is mainly because I have had countless experiences in the wild with them.

Throughout the summer I got to meet with animals on a closer and individual level. Of the numerous times that my fellow interns and I had gone out on the trails at

Strawberry Plains, I cannot think of one where I did not go face first into a web. It would be foolish to not expect it. Though I still freak out at a web being on my face, the orb weavers themselves do not bother me anymore. In fact the opposite has happened since I have come in close contact with them. Every time I see an orb weaver, I stop to admire the unique abdomen of each of them. The variety always leaves me dumbfounded. The change of edges and colors makes each one I walk into a special snowflake. I am incredibly glad to be able to handle myself around those type of spiders now, but now I need to work on dealing with other spiders and insects.

My time at Strawberry Plains was an incredible experience to have. I am very grateful for the time I have spent with all of the staff as well as the skills I learned while working. This was my first time working anywhere and I wouldn't trade in the time I spent working for anything. One of the many things I learned was that there are many problems with how people view nature and I hope to be a person that can change that in the future. I will never forget what I learned this summer and I look forward to the places where I can further develop my conservation as well as professional skills.