As I reflect back on 2020, I am stunned at what the country has experienced and what we have been challenged by in our corner of the world here at Riverside Nature Center. It has taken great thought and energy and passion to work through 2020! We did it!

Thanks to the leadership of our Executive Director and her able staff, we have been able to continue our mission serving this community even in the most difficult of times. We have become flexible and creative in how we deliver educational programs and continue outreach to our school age children. We have remained committed to advancing the stewardship of our environment by continuing our partnerships in the community.

Through the generosity of our membership and benefactors, we have met our financial challenges. Our $25,000 matching challenge turned into over $65,000! As we jump into 2021, we are in a much better position to further develop our new programs and sustain our operations.

We joyfully look forward to 2021 and hopefully the return of not only the bees and butterflies and birds but all of you as well!

Thank you again for your support and commitment to the Nature Center.

See you soon!

Barbara Oates
President
Riverside Nature Center Upcoming Events & Programs

Bird Walk & Talk
1/16 8am-9:30am
Join Paul & Deloris Sellin on a stroll along the River Trail where you will observe the avian inhabitants and learn about their life histories. All ages and level of experience are welcome.

Meet at the Dog Park at Flat Rock Lake Park, 3840 Riverside Dr., Kerrville, TX 78028

Limited attendance, only the first 8 people will be allowed to attend so show up early! Please be ready to wear a face mask if proper distancing is not possible.

Annual Membership Webinar Meeting
1/28 5:30pm-6:30pm
You are invited to attend Riverside Nature Center’s Annual Membership Meeting. Elections for board officers and directors will be held as well as a review of 2020 highlights, financial status and a peak into 2021 activities.

Please register at https://riversidenaturecenter.org/ or call 257-4837.

NEd Talk Webinar: Bluebirding Basics
Date & Time TBA
Did you know that spotting a bluebird is usually recognized as a symbol of joy and happiness that you'll be expecting in the future?

The symbol of the bluebird is found in many cultures and dates back thousands of years.

Let's explore the life history of this famous bird and learn what we can do to help arrest its decline.

Please register at https://riversidenaturecenter.org/,
(830)257-4837 or email rnc.kerrville@gmail.com

For more information visit our website at riversidenaturecenter.org
The SS Reflection: Finding The Right Words

By Susan Sander

2020 is about to pass into memory, finally, leaving behind a long trail that challenged our psyches to make sense of something invisible but deadly. It’s discomforting to be a science experiment, first by a novel virus, then by the hypotheses of doctors and scientists, and then by those in positions of power who just had to weigh in. A lot of words came and went. Few words helped those who suffered with the illness, or imposed restrictions.

For me it was the words of a young Walt Whitman that brought some grounding:

“After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, love, and so on — have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear — what remains? Nature remains; to bring out from their torpid recesses, the affinities of a man or woman with the open air, the trees, fields, the changes of seasons — the sun by day and the stars of heaven by night.”


In unpacking I came across a newspaper snippet where I was quoted, “I started a nature center because I couldn’t find a job in philosophy.” But pondering has served me well. For all the different ways humans can think about the world and describe their place in it, like Whitman, I always come back to Nature.

And I am finally settled enough to lift my gaze back to sky and trees, and reduce my “searching” and instead, just be. To be silent, but not necessarily wordless.

Words have become central in my effort to help my 5 year-old grandniece learn to read. She’d rather act. And so she squirms, goes deaf, or just tells me with sad eye her brain is tired. I’ve introduced her to a visual dictionary which sometimes gets her attention. And since we live in a world where all we have to do is ask out loud Siri or Alexa anything, it’s sad to think that we don’t have to really think about words.

So I’ve been pondering the role of words as a basic way we share; and books are more like gifts, in that someone wrote something they considered important: be it knowledge, a description, an emotion.

Not long ago I came across an article on The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane. It would seem logical that language evolves, words are added and others dropped in our constant shifting conversations. But in 2007 to make way for the new, such as broadband and cut and paste in the Oxford Junior Dictionary, “55 words relating to nature were dropped.”

(Cont. Pg 4)
Among the lost were the acorn, dandelion and fern, heron and kingfisher, willow and wren. Even the raven was nevermore in the dictionary.

Nature doesn’t need our words to describe or even name its many facets. Nature is about being. But for humans, words are how we relate to each other and Nature. If we stop talking about Nature, writing about it and for it, we will lose more than words.

Finding dandelions blooming in January in Texas was always a delight. A bounty of acorns is a menu for deer and turkey, and squirrels who help plant the oaks of the future. How to describe the river without the presence of heron or willow. They are not just words but place holders and participants of the bigger, real world we live in. 2020 took a lot of things away but I will not give up the words that conjure up those moments of delight. 2020 was filled with sorrow and loss. 2021 needs to be filled with renewal and hope.

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**Partners In Nature Spotlight**

We are beyond thankful for our Partners In Nature that have joined with Riverside Nature Center to support our mission: Advancing the stewardship of our environment. By becoming a PIN they have helped us with much needed support during this hard economic time.

To learn more about or PIN’s, click on the logo image (if viewing in PDF form) or visit their websites listed under the logo.

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To become a Partner In Nature, or for more information, visit the Partners In Nature section of our website.
T’was the 19th of December and Riverside Nature Center opened their doors...
for a Holiday Open House packed with goodies galore.

Our Holiday Open House proved to be a fun success. We had many new visitors traveling from all over Texas join us for hot apple cider and treats of Chex Mix, homemade cookies, and candy canes.

After snacking, guests were treated to a tour of the “Return of the Birds” exhibit and then later in the day Board member, Becca Bigott, read everyone the story “My Penguin Osbert” in the Stone Circle.
After storytime, it was time to let the creative juices flow with some ornament decorating!

Using paint, gems, beads, glitter, and whatever else they could find, our visitors all got to decorate and keep their own holiday ornament!

It was a good time had by all!

Thank you to all of the volunteers that helped make our event a success!
Almost all the birds that we can see in January have already arrived by December. Leaving out our resident birds (birds that are here year round), there are many species that can be seen in the Kerr County area in January. Here is a partial list, in taxonomic, not abundance order:

1. Ducks are some of the more easily seen birds because of their sizes: Gadwalls, Northern Pintails, American Wigeons, Northern Shovelers, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Canvasbacks, Redheads, Ring-necked, Ruddy, Buffleheads, and Lesser Scaup. Three of the public areas in Kerrville where these Ducks may be found are the River Trail, Nimitz Lake (above and below the dam at Guadalupe Park), and Flat Rock Lake Park (especially at the Dog Park end). A better time to see these birds in these locations is in the morning, with the sun behind you, so the birds are not back lit.

2. Hummingbirds. As I write this article just before Christmas. I have two hummingbirds coming to sugar water feeders (no red dye, please), a female Rufous and, surprisingly, a female Ruby-throated. Yes, I am a good hummer daddy and put out a fresh, warmed up feeder on sub-freezing mornings. Anna’s are being seen way more often than normal this winter. The Anna’s are part of a Western species “invasion” this year. At least two are being seen in Kerr County yards as I write this.

3. Bald Eagle. A regular winter visitor, most often seen flying over the Guadalupe River.

4. Woodpeckers and Sapsuckers. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Northern Flickers can be seen “hiking” up and down the larger limbs on trees. The dropped leaves of the trees and vines make it easy to see them. Maybe you will see a more Western U.S. “Red-shafted” Flicker variety this winter.

5. American Kestrel are seen very regularly on utility wires on the roadsides. Merlins are rarer.

6. Ravens. In the western part of Kerr County, the Chihuahuan Raven can sometimes been seen and, often, heard, giving its almost duck-like “Quack” flight call. If your Raven has a squared off, not pointed tip on its tail, give it a second look. As always, you can take a photo and figure it out later. No points off using photos to get a good ID. Even using your smartphone’s voice recorder can sometimes work to record any Raven’s rather loud call.

7. Kinglets. Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned are both possible, with Ruby much more likely. Yes, they are small and move fast, but you can see them when they slow down for a few seconds.

8. Bluebirds. The Western invasion strikes again. Western Bluebirds are around, and, in some nearby counties, Mountain Bluebirds.
9. Hermit Thrush. These are winter time only birds in the Hill Country. They like to feed in thick brush and usually stay low to the ground. American Robins are much more numerous in winter here.

10. Cedar Waxwings. My “squeaky” friends, often in flocks of dozens, will be seen well into Spring.

11. Pine Siskin. Invasion! I’ve never seen so many as this winter. Be sure you have fresh seeds, purchased from reliable stores like Wild Birds Unlimited, in your feeders.

12. American Goldfinch. Often they can be seen with Lesser Goldfinches and Pine Siskins. Lesser Goldfinches are the smallest, Siskins in the middle and American the largest. Remember, Americans are in their duller, winter “clothes.”

13. Sparrows. White-crowns are singing. White-throated Sparrows are less frequent, but are often near the White-crowns. Most other Sparrows you see are winter visitors here. Dark-eyed Juncos are often with the Sparrows.


15. Warblers. Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, and, less commonly, Pine Warblers are around, especially Yellow-rumped. Almost all Yellow-rumped Warblers here are of the “Myrtle” type.

16. Pyrrhuloxia. They are a lot more secretive than our year-round Northern Cardinal.

Looking at these bar charts for Kerr County (county can be changed) helped me and can help you:
https://ebird.org/barchart?r=US-TX-265&amp;yr=all&amp;m=

TL: Hermit Thrush
BL: American Kestrel
BR: Cedar Waxwing
TR: Ruby-Crowned Kinglet
Welcome New Members
If you would like to renew your membership or become a member of the
Riverside Nature Center please visit
https://riversidenaturecenter.org/about-rnc/become-a-member/

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