



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

May - Paying Attention



I love the sound of frogs in springtime, so when I heard about a Frog Hike in mid-April, I couldn't wait. It was to be held at Poag Sand Prairie, a little 10-acre "geological gem" outside Edwardsville, Illinois. The evening of the Frog Hike I joined about 20 others and listened to Professor Essner and his graduate students as they charmed us with descriptions of the prairie's most unique inhabitants pictured here, threatened Illinois chorus frogs. This unique species burrows in the sand, living almost their entire lives underground. It makes sense that they are threatened, since sand prairies are one of Illinois' rarest and oldest landscapes, formed as retreating glaciers ground up rocks more than 10,000 years ago. All this information deepened my appreciation for the Heartland Conservancy's efforts to protect this sandy treasure with its rare frogs and to provide visitors with a trail

and events to experience the very special life here.

For years as I traveled Highway 255 I had no knowledge about Poag Sand Prairie. Instead, what grabbed my attention was something much bigger, Lakeview Commerce Center where 8 warehouses with 6.5 million square feet of space store products for companies like Amazon, Hershey, and Procter and Gamble. As I drove past this eyesore I bewailed its existence and what it says about consumerism. My attention was only focused on the obvious; I had no idea what lay adjacent to it.

Now when I pass by my attention is thankfully focused elsewhere. This juxtaposition of natural area with the unnatural commerce center reminds me of Jenny O'Dell's thoughts in her book *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*. She writes, *When the pattern of your attention has changed, you render your reality differently. You begin to move and act in a different kind of world ... As I disengaged the map of my attention from the destructive news cycle and rhetoric of productivity, I began to build another one based on that of the more-than-human community, simply through patterns of noticing ... As a result, more and more actors appeared in my reality: after birds, there were trees, then different kinds of trees, then the bugs that lived in them. I began to notice animal communities, plant communities, animal-plant communities; mountain ranges, fault lines, watersheds. ... I was met with the uncanny knowledge that these had all been here before, yet they had been invisible to me in previous renderings of my reality.*

How true! I really felt my reality had changed and that I was moving in a different world – more alive, unique, special, one that evokes gratitude and awe and is worth sharing. Here is a concluding message from Mary Oliver's poem *Sometimes*:

Instructions for life:

Pay attention

Be astonished

Tell about it.

May 10 Workday in the Oblates' Preserve 9:00 – 11:30 am

Speaking of paying attention, since I began removing honeysuckle at La Vista, I started seeing it **everywhere**. Driving down a road lined with it, I want to jump out of the car and get to work. Walking in a park choked with it, I imagine the native flowers and oak trees that **WOULD** be present if the honeysuckle and other invasives were gone. I am also more attentive and grateful in areas where the hard work has been done, like Knobelach Woods in Belleville, Illinois. On a wildflower hike there in mid-April, I observed an abundance of spring ephemerals covering the forest floor like the bellwort pictured here. The variety and abundance was simply stunning!



This is the goal for our La Vista Woods – a carpet of natives in spring and the growth of more oak trees, restoring the woods to health. Please join us to make this happen, and let me know - 618-466-5004.

Sunday, May 15-16 Total Lunar Eclipse 8:32 pm – 1:50 am

On a cloudless night this event will be a perfect opportunity to practice paying attention and experiencing an alternative *rendering of reality* as O'Dell describes above. In addition to observing the slowly changing face of the moon we can also listen to night sounds, watch for nocturnal animals and birds, observe shadows in the moonlight, and feel the night air encircling our bodies. So, get your favorite chair and head out to receive this blessing which is sure to evoke gratitude and awe.

May 20 World Bee Day and Endangered Species Day

The fact that these days coincide is our invitation to pay attention to ALL KINDS of pollinators all through the seasons to keep them off the endangered species list. Our work may include:

- Choosing native plants in a variety of shapes and colors
- Planting in clumps of the same color to help pollinators find them
- Including native shrubs like elderberries, chokeberries, red osier dogwood, New Jersey tea, fragrant sumac, and spicebush in our planting plans
 - Providing native flowers throughout the season, since late-blooming flowers will serve those pollinators that over-winter in your garden
 - Leaving flower stalks and seed heads over the winter, only removing them mid-April when whatever is living in them begins a new life cycle

Finally - thank pollinators! In addition to acknowledging that we couldn't live without them, we recognize their intrinsic value outside of what they do for us. Visit the Xerces Society's web site for important and often unthought of ways to minimize human impact on pollinators: [Managing Habitat for Pollinators](#).



May 22 Soul Sunday

10:30 – 11:30 am

On the fourth Sunday every month we join in focusing our attention for an hour of prayer and reflection to enhance and celebrate our connection with the Divine within as well as our concern for our rare and precious planet Earth. No registration necessary.

