

Get Outside and In the Moment

Written by Kim Ogren, BT Contributor
February 2019

Overcome your nature deficit disorder this year



I squeal over the fact that there's a screech owl in my neighborhood. I hear him more this time of year, when we have our windows open. Usually in the evenings, when the noise of the car traffic has died.

There's an unmistakable whinnying. If you've ever heard one, you'd know it. If you haven't, it's worth a listen: www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/eastern-screech-owl; check under the link "songs and calls."

When I have an experience like this in Miami, it's powerful. It feeds my soul. It makes me happy. I think, if I hear the owl screech, it must have habitat. It must have food sources. Sometimes I hear a call and response farther away, and I'm absolutely giddy.

Also, subconsciously, my overwrought mind shifts or quiets altogether. My senses become focused on hearing another screech. And my gut knows instantly what's important (and what isn't). It's serendipitous. I don't have to work hard to make it happen. I'm more attuned to the possibility. But this opportunism is a skill that comes from practice that is worthy of pursuit.

In his groundbreaking 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv coined the phrase "nature deficit disorder," which sparked a movement to reverse the detrimental effects of a life lived indoors.

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Nature's Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative by Florence Williams, and Wallace Nichols's *Blue Mind* respond to Louv's concern, as does Louv's own *Vitamin N*

. And now we're looking for forests to bathe in and getting prescriptions from our doctors to get outdoors. We've learned a lot about our need for nature.

I never needed convincing. I've long considered my ideal day: It requires I check winds and tides, pack a meal, and know when the sun will rise and set. A day designed around traffic is a failure. I contemplate the life of a fishing guide or a field biologist, like my father and many friends. Gardeners and farmers are also completely connected with the outside world.

Before we became a mostly city-dwelling species, we relied on the *Old Farmer's Almanac* to guide us through the seasons. In 2005 -- and only in 2005 -- Eric Utne (of the *Utne Reader*

) published

Cosmo DooGood's Urban Almanac: Celebrating Nature & Her Rhythms in the City

. I thought it was a terrific adaptation that could help me find nature in Miami.

I imagine with great envy that many *BT* readers enjoy sunbathing, walking (barefoot!) on the beach, boating in the bay, and even dipping in the Atlantic this time of year. You lucky dogs, feeling the breeze on your bare legs, hearing the waves, tasting the saltwater.

But not everyone is that proximate to Miami's greatest open spaces, our waters. To boot, we have no almanacs to guide us and fewer rhythms to observe in this increasingly chaotic world. We must make do.

The father of biodiversity, E. O. Wilson, made the most of what he had, which happened to be only one good eye. His 1990 book, *The Ants*, won a Pulitzer Prize, and now retired from Harvard, Wilson remains a preeminent scholar and advocate for preserving half of the planet in its natural state. Noticing the smallest of things can lead to the greatest ideas.

In January, the world lost Mary Oliver, an award-winning and widely adored poet living in Hobe

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Sound. Her accessible style blended exploration of nature and spirituality. Her poems compel you sit for a moment and be *in* the moment. With a little fine-tuning in your awareness, aided by Oliver's writing, you too can learn how to be open to a world that exists all around you.

Oliver once wrote on praying: "It doesn't have to be blue iris, it can be weeds in a vacant lot. Just pay attention, then patch a few words together and don't try to make them elaborate."

Connecting to nature need not be an ambition. Or a destination. Like Oliver's writing, connecting clearly to what is accessible is preferable.

We're not exactly making *more* nature or keeping what we've got, for that matter. So take the simplest notice of something. Examine what you can, where you can, when you can. I love the turkey vultures because I know the service they provide. I envision the swirling kettles they form to reach the thermals.

As the days grow longer, your senses and observations will sharpen. You'll have a question. The answer will open heart and mind. Just this week, I finally asked a friend why all the leaves fall in the springtime here. Turns out they are "tardily deciduous."

With a simple observation, remarkable thoughts can come into being. It's as if the owl is Oliver herself: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

Contact Kim Ogren with your comments and ideas at goinggreen@biscaynetimes.com

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