



LIGHTS AND SHADOWS FROM THE DISHMAN HILLS

July 1983

IT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY

Many kinds of living things, including humans, have an urge to defend pieces of their habitat they consider necessary for their survival as individuals, families or larger groups. The most conspicuous examples of defense of territory, as it is called, are to be seen among birds. The male robin drives off other males of his species that enter his nesting territory, although the same two birds usually get along very peaceably during other times of the year. Quite clearly a pair of robins raising a brood must have a certain amount of land that will not only provide a nest site but also enough food for a ravenous family that grows from tiny hatchlings to flying young in sixteen days! Allowing another pair to settle within his territory would spell failure for both families. The male robin pays little or no attention, however, to birds of other species within his territory. Instinctively he knows that other species offer no threat of competition, since their food needs are different.

How is it then that some species of birds nest in colonies, close together? Cliff swallows build dozens or even hundreds of their mud jug nests close together under eaves of buildings, beneath bridges or on cliffs, yet get along peacefully. Gulls nesting on islands by thousands become defensive only for a few square feet of space surrounding their nests and sea birds swarm on nesting ledges of cliffs. This apparent contradiction seems to be based upon two facts. First, the colony nesters are strong fliers, easily covering distances necessary to find food. Secondly, their food is relatively abundant and is continually renewed. Swallows gather their food on the wing. Insect food is relatively abundant and furthermore, air currents continually bring in new swarms of insects. The gulls are able to fly many miles in search of food and cliff-nesting colonies along the ocean find an abundant food supply, replenished by ocean currents. Species that rely upon food that must be searched out on the ground or in the vegetation have to work harder to supply their families and appear to find flying long distances too energy-expensive. Hence they must live close to their "work"; they cannot afford to commute long distances, nor can they afford to share their "jobs" with another family, since there is only enough "pay" for one.

In the "human world"--except for nomadic peoples--those who make a living directly from the land, such as farmers and ranchers, find it more efficient to live upon that land, rather than some distance away, say in a city. Traveling back and forth would be too expensive in both time and energy. Since the Industrial Revolution the trend has been to concentrate the means of livelihood into small areas (cities) with people often forced to live at some distance from their work. This trend has become even more pronounced as people find it more pleasant to live in the relatively open, quiet, clean countryside and commute, sometimes as much as fifty miles or more each way. The question before us is, what is the cost in time and energy for all this commuting? Can we continue to travel as far to work as we do now? Time may not be the deciding factor, as the work day probably will become shorter or at least not lengthen. But we all know that energy (petroleum) prices are continually rising as fossil fuels become exhausted and the cost of maintaining our vast highway network increases.

There is still some room left for any adults or high school students who wish to take part in the Ecology Daycamp on the Little Spokane River July 30 and August 1 - 5. For information call 466-6668 or 487-8921.

FLOWERS WANE BUT INSECTS SWARM

The myriads of insects during the summer months assure many opportunities for the curious observer to watch them feeding, courting and their young developing. Ants, bees and wasps with their complex social lifestyles are always fascinating. Then there are the antlions, whose larvae ("doodlebugs") dig pits in sandy soil, trapping ants and other small creatures that stumble in. Cicadas--the seventeen year "locust" of the eastern states is the most famous species--after living underground for many years, emerge, molt their old "skins" and become winged, noisy adults in late May and early June. Later they will lay rows of eggs in slits they cut in the twigs of shrubs. Butterfly and moth caterpillars are always fun to watch and perhaps to bring home to rear to the adult state, which may not be reached until the following spring. Grasshoppers reach their winged stage in July, having grown from eggs that overwintered in the ground. The drab lesser migratory locust is our most common species but several kinds of band-winged locusts often appear, crackling their colorful wings as they fly. These latter prefer places with some bare ground, since dense vegetation makes taking flight difficult for their large wings. The many kinds of spiders display their diverse ways of catching their prey, from several kinds of webs--it's fascinating to watch them spin them--to waiting on flowers for unwary bees or flies or running over the ground in pursuit.

By July relatively few flowers remain in the drier lower hills but the pale lavender mariposa or sego lily helps make up for this. Also to appear are the odd, leafless pinedrops and the canyon heather, goldenrod, wild asters and Indian hemp begin to flower. In the higher, cooler habitats come into flower the twinflower, harebell, pearly everlasting, monkshood, fireweed and false hellebore.

County Parks superintendent Sam Angove reports no further progress yet in obtaining an option on the land proposed for addition to Dishman Hills Natural Area. Since we do not know how much our association will be asked to contribute toward the purchase price, we encourage you to keep sending in your contributions. Hopefully there will be something more positive to report in August.

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving some of the natural environment of the Spokane area for people to enjoy and learn from. Our monthly meetings are at Kiwanis Camp Caro, S. 625 Sargent Road at 7:30 p.m. the fourth Wednesday. You are cordially invited to attend. For further information and for slide programs and guide service into the Dishman Hills call us at 926-7949.

Please use this form when sending contributions to save the Dishman Hills and the Tower Mountain corridor. Your dues and/or gifts are income tax deductible.

\$ ___ Annual dues (\$5) New? ___ Renewal? ___

\$ ___ Land purchase fund

\$ ___ In remembrance of _____

\$ ___ Bulletin expense fund (\$1 or more)

_____ Your account number above your address.

Please make checks payable to Dishman Hills Natural Area Association and mail to David E. Lenten, Treasurer, E. 10922 23rd Spokane, WA. 99206. Many Thanks! To reduce expense, no receipt or acknowledgement will be sent unless requested.