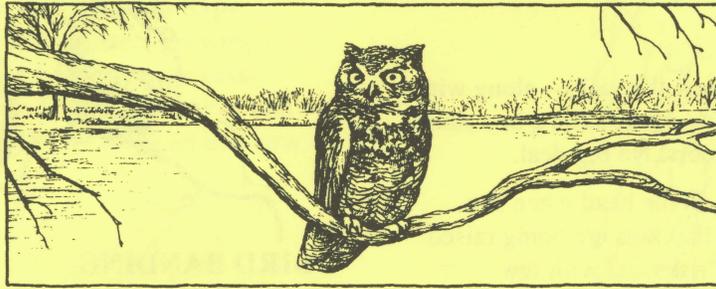


# STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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## IRRATIONAL FEARS OF NATURE

-- Mark Spreyer

*Editor's Note.* In 2005, Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, received much well-deserved attention. *Ecophobia*, as some call it, is not news to those of us that work as environmental educators. With that in mind, I offer the following column that first appeared, four years ago, in the **Barrington Courier-Review**.

It's quite obvious that my peers who have kids have a different take on safety than the parents who raised us. As a kid, I was hit by a car while riding my bike. There was blood, crying, and a lecture on how I should be more careful, but no helmet. Helmets, of course, make sense but prudent safety concerns have evolved, I'm sorry to say, into an unwarranted fear of nature.

When autumn begins to chill the air, how often do you see kids wait for a school bus outside? What I see are kids sitting in a heated car at the end of their driveway. From there, perhaps with headphones on, they hop into a heated bus. Hard to see a hawk soar or watch a squirrel bury acorns when you aren't even allowed to wait outside a few minutes for the bus.

Worried about child abductions? Check the numbers. Compared to previous years, the number of abductions hasn't increased this year, media attention notwithstanding.

I'm not the first to observe this. In a wonderful article that appeared in the journal of the **Massachusetts Audubon Society**, Deborah Knight talked with a woman who lives in Lincoln, Massachusetts. In the sixties and seventies, she used to let her kids wander the hills and ride

their bikes unsupervised. When she has grandchildren, she will not allow them the freedom she allowed her own kids in the same town.

Has the town changed? According to the police chief, a 30-year veteran of nearby Bedford, there hasn't been a single child abduction in town and it is no less safe than it used to be. What has changed? Our perceptions.

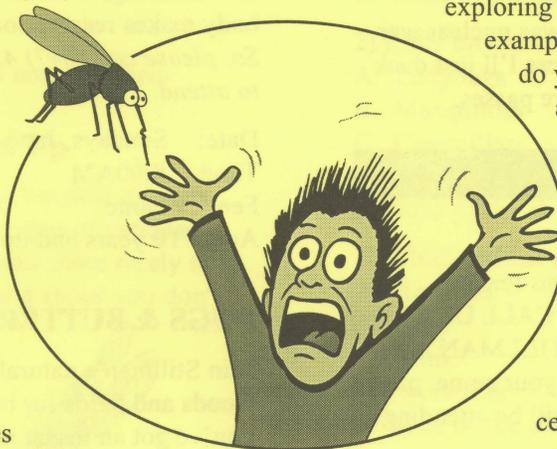
### Inaccurate Perceptions

Inaccurate perceptions are keeping our kids from exploring the outdoors which is their loss. For example, if a kid is just "hanging out," what do you think she is up to? Anna Quindlen answered that question in a column she wrote for *Newsweek*, "There is a culture of adult distrust that suggests that a kid who is not playing softball or attending science-enrichment programs-- or both-- is huffing or boosting cars...." What a shame.

Even if they are attending a science-enrichment program at a nature center, the adults' fear of nature still creeps in. At Massachusetts Audubon's Habitat sanctuary, parents who registered for the "mud class" were shocked when their children actually got dirty! By the way, the children probably could have found mud closer to home but would their parents have let them play with it?

Locally, some schools are reluctant to visit Stillman because we have ticks. As I detailed in a previous article, the odds of getting Lyme disease at Stillman are virtually nil, certainly far less than getting harmed while riding in a car.

I explain to teachers that we only have wood ticks which don't carry Lyme disease. Be that as it may, after



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one school found a few ticks (not attached) on some returning students, the school was fumigated!

## Back in the Day

Lucky for me, my parents knew that ticks-- along with chiggers, sunburn, and poison ivy-- were what a boy came home with when he played outdoors. No big deal.

Deborah Knight hits the nail on the head when she mentions a mother who worries that kids are being raised in an environment, "...devoid of risks and with few opportunities to develop responsibility to take care of themselves. She worries too, that her own children simply evince little interest in playing in the natural world."

According to Anna Quindlen, it isn't just an appreciation of the natural world that is at stake when overscheduled and oversupervised kids aren't allowed any downtime. "Downtime is where we become ourselves, looking into the middle distance, kicking at the curb, lying on the grass or sitting on the stoop and staring at the tedious blue of the summer sky. I don't believe you can write poetry, or compose music, or become an actor without downtime, and plenty of it..."

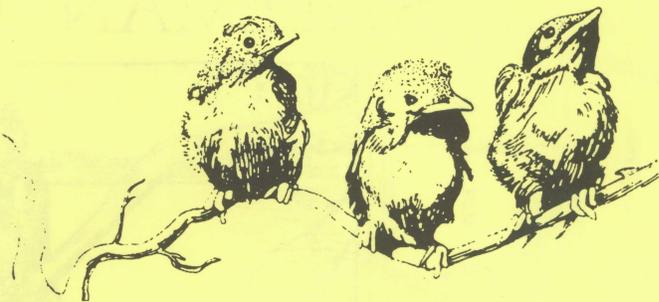
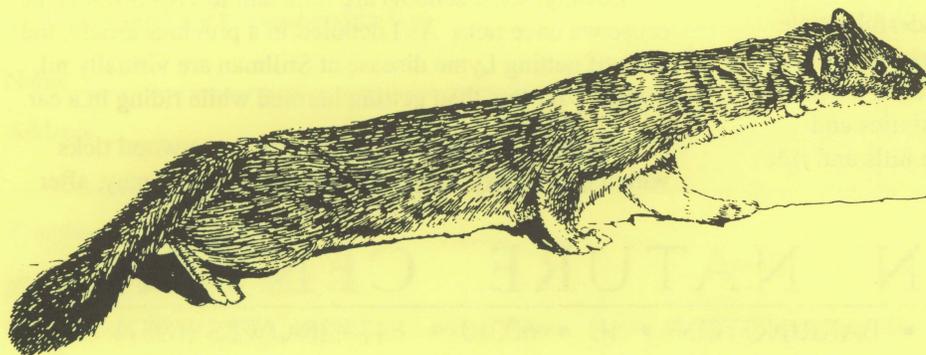
I know that I am a naturalist because I had plenty of downtime which gave me a chance to explore the Barrington countryside. Be that as it may, I realize it is too late to put irrational parental fear back in the bottle.

In my younger days, the bogey man was nuclear war. Remember "duck and cover" drills? I guess I'll just duck and cover and hope that this fear of nature passes.

## PROGRAMS

TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs (except for bird banding open houses), PLEASE CALL US AT (847) 428-OWLS (6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: stillnc@flash.net. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.



## BIRD BANDING

Watch Mark Spreyer, a licensed bird bander, measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Birds are not caught in a predictable manner, so come prepared to hike the trails. With luck, you'll see a bird in the hand and two in the bush. If it is raining, the banding open house will be cancelled.

Dates: Sundays, June 4, July 2 & August 6  
Time: 9:00AM to Noon  
Fee: None

## SUNDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does.

If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled. Also, if nobody makes reservations, the program will not take place. So, please call (847) 428-OWLS to let us know if you plan to attend.

Date: Sundays, June 11, July 9 & August 13  
Time: 8:00AM  
Fee: None  
Age: 10 years and up

## BUGS & BUTTERFLIES



Join Stillman's naturalist and search the nature center's woods and fields for butterflies, beetles and other bugs. If you've got an insect net at home, bring it along! Since we will be handling the bugs, please minimize the amount of insect repellent that you have on your hands. Don't forget to call (847) 428-OWLS to make reservations.

Date: Sunday, July 16  
Time: 2:00 PM  
Fee: None



## PRAIRIE RAMBLE

Our volunteers, under the leadership of **Daria Sapp**, have been working hard to get prairie plants growing in Stillman's "south forty." They've been quite successful and this is your chance to join Daria on a tour of this colorful site. Please call (847) 428-OWLS to let us know if you plan to attend.

Date: Sunday, July 30  
Time: 10:00AM  
Fee: None

## SUNRISE YOGA HIKE

Join us as yoga instructor **Evamarie Pilpuf** leads the group on a walk along the nature center's trails, pausing at regular intervals to engage in various yoga postures. A perfect way to combine the energizing benefits of yoga and fitness with the enjoyment of the outdoors. All levels are welcome; no prior yoga experience needed. Wear comfortable clothing and athletic shoes, and bring a large, old towel (for the times we sit on the ground).

If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled.

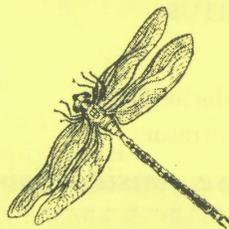
*Please call (847) 428-OWLS to let us know if you plan to attend.*

Date: Saturday, Aug. 5  
Time: 8:00 - 10:30AM  
Age: 18 years and up  
Workshop Fee: \$7 members, \$10 non-members

## POND LIFE: From the Bottom Up

This afternoon, with the help of long-handled dip nets, visitors will scoop into our pond in hopes of catching crayfish, dragonfly larvae, tadpoles and other rarely seen pond inhabitants. Dress in clothes and shoes you don't mind getting muddy.

Date: Sunday, August 20  
Time: 2:00PM  
Fee: None



## HAIKU HYDROLOGY

In 2002, Tacoma Water sponsored a contest, for middle school students, to write haikus about water. The first-prize winner in the fifth grade was Miranda Foster with this poetic take on the hydrologic cycle:

Evaporation  
Condensation's next in line  
Precipitation.

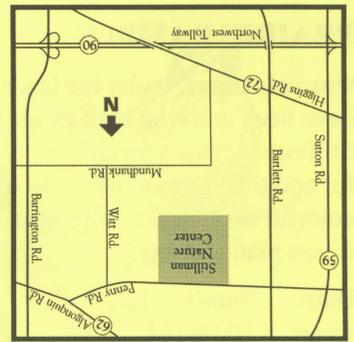
*The News Tribune (Tacoma, Washington); June 19, 2002.*



## Mammal Quiz

- 1) Which of the following is the largest rodent in our area?  
A. Norway rat  
B. Cottontail rabbit  
C. Muskrat  
D. Beaver  
E. None of the above
- 2) Little brown and big brown bats feed mainly on:  
A. Ladybugs  
B. Mosquitoes  
C. Caterpillars  
D. Deerflies  
E. None of the above
- 3) Which animal is not a member of the weasel family?  
A. Raccoon  
B. Otter  
C. Mink  
D. Wolverine  
E. None of the above
- 4) What animal uses cattails both as food and house building material?  
A. Opossum  
B. Otter  
C. Muskrat  
D. Beaver  
E. None of the above
- 5) What is the average weight of an adult red fox?  
A. 5 pounds  
B. 10 pounds  
C. 20 pounds  
D. 30 pounds

Quiz Answers: 1) D. beaver 2) B. mosquitoes 3) A. raccoon 4) C. muskrat 5) B. 10 pounds



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