



# Wake-Robin

Newsletter of the John Burroughs Association  
at the American Museum of Natural History

---

## Highlights of the JBA Awards Luncheon, April 2, 2006

**Medal Winner: Donald Kroodsma**  
*The Singing Life of Birds: The Art and  
Science of Listening to Birdsong*  
(Houghton Mifflin Company)

*Review by Jan DeBlieu*

These spring mornings the woods are filled with song, and not just the workaday chirps and chor-tles of the bird year. In mating season as birds employ the vocalizations of courtship, their language takes on a richness that matches anything we humans have to offer. In fact, human speech seems a heck of a lot easier to understand.

Donald Kroodsma's life work has been listening to birds. And to our great fortune, in *The Singing Life of Birds* he describes his discoveries in a style that conveys at once his knowledge, sensitivity, passion, and humor.

"You must have exceptional ears," people tell him. To which he replies that he hears with his eyes. For thirty-five years Kroodsma has used sonograms to analyze bird song. These graphs, which look something like a cross between an echocardiogram and a musical score, enable him to see the nuances of a bird's many songs. He has studied long enough and hard enough to recognize when birds of a feather sing not just slightly different songs, but different dialects and entirely different languages.

"Listen to any bird sing, and the first question

that comes to mind is where he got his song," Kroodsma writes. Scientist think they know the answer, but only in broad and perhaps inaccurate strokes. Some species learn to sing, while others seem to have songs encoded in their DNA. As is often the case with nature, the devil is in the details. Early in his career as a researcher, Kroodsma's study of sonograms showed that male Bewick's wrens in Oregon sing an average of sixteen different songs apiece, and that young birds tend to sing in dialects learned from their neighbors—not, as previously thought, from their fathers. Later, from years in the field with microphones and headphones and even more time in the lab, poring over graphs, he showed that in some species even mature

birds change their songs, improvising where necessary like jazz musicians. Their goal, of course, is to impress females with their virtuosity.

The three wattled bell bird of Costa Rica is a subcine, a close relative of flycatchers, which generally don't learn to sing. But with his colleagues, Kroodsma demonstrated that young bell birds in Costa Rica do learn their songs; in fact, they speak different languages before settling into their own. In our own country, he showed that young male sedge wrens wholly invent their songs, trying out

phrases from other birds, crafting a unique repertoire that they hope will win them the prize—the mate, or



*The Astor Turret at the American Museum of Natural History.*

*Photo by Jackie Beckett*

*Awards Luncheon continued on page 3*

## Birding with Tim Gallagher

By Joan Burroughs

Member of the JBA Board of Directors

Just as Slabsides is watched over by the JBA, John Burroughs's summer home in Roxbury, New York—Woodchuck Lodge, a registered National Historic Landmark—benefits from the attentions of a nonprofit organization, Woodchuck Lodge, Inc. Under the direction of its president, Julianne Lutz Newton, great-great-grand-niece of John Burroughs, that organization also presents public programs. A memorable one, hardly dampened by the drizzle that fell over the weekend, was a lecture on June 4, 2006, by Tim Gallagher, one of the very few who have seen the rare and elusive ivory-billed woodpecker. Editor of *Living Bird*, from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Gallagher shared his odyssey of tracking the bird, which is more fully described in his book *The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005).

Earlier that day Tim led a small group of Woodchuck Lodge donors on a morning bird walk along Burroughs Memorial Road from Woodchuck Lodge to the homestead. The birds were active and on occasion nearly filled the air with songs and calls. As we set out, an unseen oven bird announced its presence clearly in the shrubs across from Woodchuck Lodge. A bobolink flitted in the morning drizzle in a hedgerow along an unsown field. On the walk, Tom Alworth, executive director of the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, noted that John Burroughs grew up with lots of bobolinks in the fields of the home farm, because the land was nearly cleared of woods then.

Wild turkeys scurried out of sight as we approached, and red-eyed vireos sang us a near constant welcome. We interrupted a couple of crows vocally clearing their territory, but a ruby-throated hummingbird was uninterruptible as it sped about. As we topped a small ridge the homestead came into view. We spied red-winged blackbirds holding court in a hedgerow on the lower side of the road. Farther down the road we were captivated by a chestnut-sided warbler foraging for insects in the branches of a small, neglected apple tree. Several American goldfinches held our attention as we made our way back to Woodchuck Lodge. They looped across the road and moved about in the higher branches of the nearby trees. As we turned into Memorial Field through the zigzag in the stone wall that had prevented the Burroughs cows from escaping the field, Tim found the decayed remains of an unfortunate duck.

At the grave site and “boyhood rock,” an invasion of caterpillars dripped off trees, piling on every possible surface. Deep wet grass drove us back to the road, where we found a partial skull of a small mam-

mal. Lively Baltimore orioles put on a show as Tim explained the classification of the genus.

Back at Woodchuck Lodge, the rain stopped long enough for a group photograph. Above us a large V of Canada geese headed north, then shifted and reformed another perfect V. We ducked back under our hooded jackets to reflect on the insights Tim had shared with us.

The birds that inspired John Burroughs still thrive along his lane. You are always welcome there for birding. Woodchuck Lodge also hosts open house days (for visitor information contact Tom Alworth at 845-586-2611)

### John Burroughs Association

The John Burroughs Association was formed in 1921 shortly after the naturalist-writer died. Among the association's aims are fostering a love of nature as exemplified by Burroughs's life and work and preserving the places associated with his life. The association publicly recognizes well written and illustrated nature essay publications with literary awards that are given after the annual meeting on the first Monday of April.

The association owns and maintains Slabsides and the adjoining John Burroughs Sanctuary near West Park, New York. Open house at Slabsides is held the third Saturday in May and the first Saturday in October. A permanent exhibit about John Burroughs is in the American Museum of Natural History.

The membership year begins in April. Contact Secretary, John Burroughs Association, Inc., 15 West 77 Street, New York, NY 10024-5192, or e-mail: [breslof@amnh.org](mailto:breslof@amnh.org). Telephone 212-769-5169. Web site: <http://research.amnh.org/burroughs/>

Wake-Robin is published in March, July, and November. Vittorio Maestro, Richard Milner, and Steve Thurston, editors. Send submissions and editorial inquiries to Secretary, John Burroughs Association, Inc., 15 West 77th Street, New York, NY 10024-5192 or e-mail [vmaestro@nhmag.com](mailto:vmaestro@nhmag.com). *Trillium* drawing © 1996 Jim Arnosky. *Wake-Robin* © 2006 John Burroughs Association, Inc.

Directors: Robert Abrams, Jackie Beckett, Lisa Breslof, Joan Burroughs, Marcia Dworak, Paul Huth, Regina Kelly, David R. Lane, David Liddell (first vice president and acting president), Jack Padalino, Evelyn Rifenburg, Selden Spencer, H. R. Stoneback, Tim Walsh, Ann Zwinger

Awards Luncheon *continued from page 1*

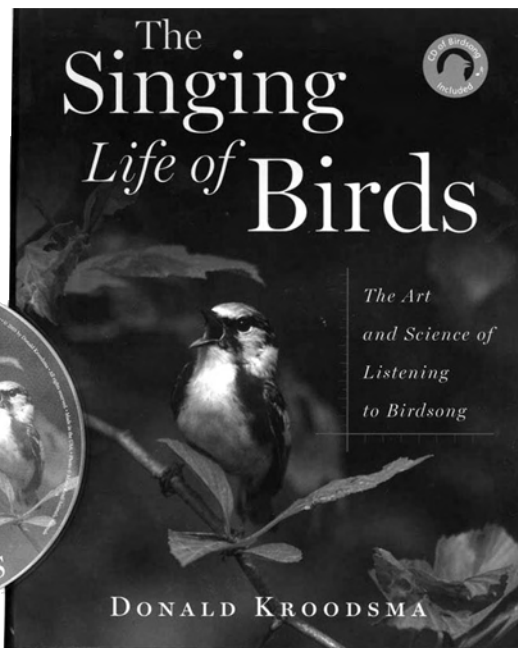
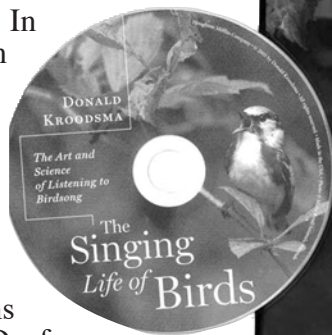


Medal Award winner Donald Kroodsma, flanked by Lisa A. White (left), representing his publisher, Houghton Mifflin Company, and reviewer Jan DeBlieu (right), the 1999 Medal Award winner. Photo by Jackie Beckett

mates, of their choice. Sedge wrens don't stay still; they are on the move too much to learn songs from their parents or neighbors. These are perhaps small discoveries in the greater scope of our war-torn world. But they are astounding to those of us who wish to know all we can of nature and its workings.

As he studies a sonogram Kroodsma writes, "Here before me is a window on the mind of each bird, what it knows, what it can sing. Beyond the cold facts on the table, I try to see into the small, warm brain, wondering how it got the songs it knows, wondering how the details of each of these songs could be encoded there." With that remarkable sensibility, he treats us to an avian cantata: species with exceptionally beautiful and complex songs, those that sing on the wing, those that never seem to tire of singing, and finally those in which the female also sings. In the case of the northern cardinal, he notes, it's the female that gets the last word.

This is a book you can dip into at any point and find immediate fascination. With the sonograms and accompanying CD of Kroodsma's recordings, you can listen with both your ears and your mind's eye. You can learn, as the author learned, how a bird's song can tell us so much about the singer—not



only what bird is singing, but even from where he may hail.

"Such power in a song—power that has moved me for more than a dozen years," he writes of the simple chickadee during its migration. "Wherever and whenever I now hear a chickadee sing, I am instantly riveted to the details, as I need to know how this particular song of this particular bird fits into the larger continental patterns." His message for us is clear: There are so many nuances to be gleaned from nature, if only we will hear.

Writer Jan DeBlieu was the 1999 JBA Medal winner for her book *Wind: How the Flow of Air Has Shaped Life, Myth, and the Land* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998). Her latest book is *Year of the Comets: A Journey from Sadness to the Stars* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005)

## Acceptance Remarks by Donald Kroodsma

It is positively exhilarating to be here, to feel the presence of John Burroughs and those who have been honored in his name. There's Burroughs himself, and Beebe and Bent and Borland, Carr and Carson and Chapman, and so on down the alphabet, authors whose writing has always moved me. Others who feel especially close are Alcock, Dethier, Heinrich, Kilham, Leopold, Mathiessen, McPhee, Olson, Peterson, Skutch, Sutton, and Teale.

Over the last several years, I've gone to many of these writers for advice, not realizing at the time that they were of the Burroughs's family. I had five rejections for my book proposal and one acceptance, a nice offer from a well-known university press in my home state. "Take it" was the advice of experienced writers. But five to one, I pondered. This is birdsong, I kept telling myself. Birdsong! What I know and feel about birdsong clearly isn't in the words on the page. No, if every publisher doesn't want this book, I must be doing something terribly wrong. If it isn't unanimous, or close to it, no one is going to get this book. So I consulted the best books I knew, many of which I come now to realize were Bur-

roughs Medal winners. After two years of help from John Burroughs and his friends, the verdict was unanimous, and I'm grateful that Russell Galen took the project on and Lisa White at Houghton Mifflin wanted the book.

I had other specific advice from a Burroughs Medal winner. It was 1993 when Vince Dethier was honored with this award for his *Crickets and Katydid*s, *Concerts and Solos*. About that time, I sat in his office, though humble Vince never mentioned his award. We were bemoaning the state of our biology department, how it had become so molecular and cellular, and how such biology missed the big picture of life itself. In the end, he had two words of advice for me: "Just write." . . . And so I have begun, retiring from my day job to spend full time trying to convey the magic of birdsong to those who would listen.

My goal is quite simple, to get people to connect with birds through their songs, to identify with them, not just to identify them. I'm convinced that most birders, for example, don't really connect with nature, but instead compete, with each other and with nature itself, using songs of birds to identify the singer so as to generate a long list of those identified at the end of the day. My goal is to have people not just identify a robin by its songs, but to sit and truly listen, to just one bird, to use the song as a window on the robin's mind.

I liken the process to relationships we have with other human beings. If you are going to your small hometown for a reunion after a long absence and want to have a "big day," I can imagine two ways of going about this. Take your list of, say, a hundred acquaintances, climb the church steeple at the downtown intersection, and use your binoculars to identify as many people as possible, checking them off on your list. OR, spend some quality time with just a few individuals, lingering over lunch or dinner, or a stroll at the nature center, and acknowledge the others in passing. To me, it's a no-brainer how we would want to experience birds, too, if only we knew how.

So this book is about learning how. It's about learning how to listen to an American robin, and then realizing that, once you really listen to robins, all of those robin-sound-alikes, such as the red-eyed vireo, rose-breasted grosbeak, Baltimore oriole, scarlet tanager, don't sound alike at all. It's the same with people: once you really get to know a friend, you'd never mistake that friend for someone else. I contend that identifying with logically precedes identifying. This book is about listening to the simplest songsters (for example, chipping sparrow) and to the most complex songsters (for example, northern mockingbird), realizing how much each has to say and how much we can hear if we linger. This book is about appreciating how different species go about their singing lives, how some learn songs and some don't, some have dialects and others don't, how females sing in some species and not in others. But it's also about how different individuals go

about their lives, how we can learn to recognize individual song sparrows or wood thrushes, for example, by how each sings.

But I hope that the reader will find this book more than the sum of its thirty stories. John Burroughs, appropriately, has the longest quote in the book, about hermit thrushes. Hermit thrushes are extraordinary singers, among the most beautiful on the planet, and late in the season, when other birds have stopped singing, hermit thrushes still have a marvelous evening performance. As Burroughs listened to hermit thrushes, he captured well what I hope the reader of this book comes to feel about birdsong in general

Mounting toward the upland again, I pause reverently as the hush and stillness of twilight come upon the woods. It is the sweetest, ripest hour of the day. And as the hermit's evening hymn goes up from the deep solitude below me, I experience that serene exaltation of sentiment of which music, literature, and religion are but faint types and symbols.

## The John Burroughs Nature Books for Young Readers for 2005

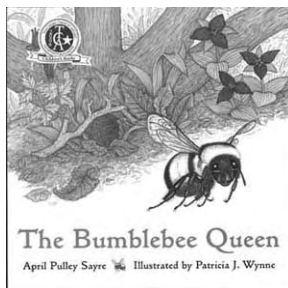
Review by Marcia L. Dworak  
Young Reader's List Award Committee Chairwoman

Early April is a time for celebration! Spring usually has begun in earnest. Trees are in bloom, daffodils and other flowering bulbs have emerged, and bird songs fill the air. The John Burroughs Association gathers in remembrance of a remarkable man's life and work. John Burroughs set a high standard with his acclaimed, popular essays based on personal observations of the natural world. In recognition of this amazing body of work, the Association seeks out the highest quality nature writing from the previous year. The best nature books for children are honored by being named to The John Burroughs List of Nature Books for Young Readers.

The books selected for 2005 are worthy additions to the distinguished books added to the list in the past. These books convey a sense of wonder about the natural world. They demonstrate a personal engagement with the topic. There is evidence of a respect for the subject matter and the reader. And finally, the beauty of the illustrations and quality of the writing draw the reader back, again and again. On behalf of the Young Reader's Jury, it is my pleasure to present the books chosen for 2005.

1. *The Bumblebee Queen*, by April Pulley Sayre,

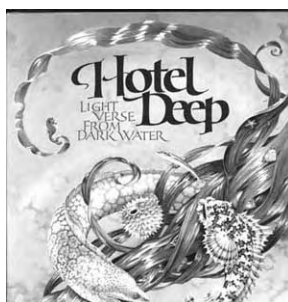
illustrated by Patricia J. Wynne (Charlesbridge); Grades 1-3.



This charming and easy-to-understand book on the life cycle of a bumblebee queen will happily entertain and educate very young readers. The text is perfectly paired with bright and cheerful ink drawings with watercolor washes. Young readers can learn such things as “Bumblebees nest in the ground or

in sheltered, mossy, grassy places such as old mouse nests, or abandoned birdhouses. Queens have even nested in teapots!” Teachers will find the accompanying resource lists and suggested activities helpful in preparing lesson plans on this valuable and interesting insect.

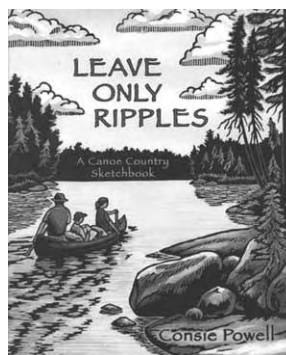
2. *Hotel Deep: Light Verse from Dark Water*, written and illustrated by Kurt Cyrus (Harcourt); Grades 3-5.



From the first page, the reader is drawn by richly textured verse into “. . . the crossroads of the deep,/ A place to sleep, A place to hide./ A place to keep your eyes wide open.” This place, underneath the ocean, is brilliantly depicted in lush paintings that suggest the motion and interplay of marine life.

The plight of a single sardine provides a bit of mystery throughout! This book is perfect for reading aloud as the words would be as much fun to say as they would be to hear.

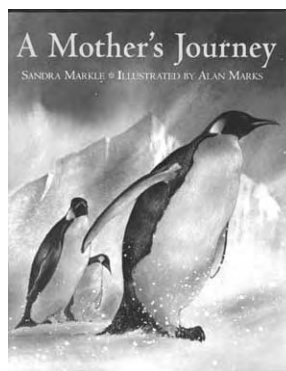
3. *Leave Only Ripples: A Canoe Country Sketchbook*, written and illustrated by Consie Powell (Raven Productions); (Ages 5-12, Adult).



Consie Powell’s captivating journal tells of a trip she took with her family by foot and by canoe through the Quetico-Superior wilderness area. The text conveys a sense of wonder and deep respect for this unspoiled, remote place. Her hand-colored woodblock prints, watercolor drawings, and field sketches are particularly appropriate to illustrate this beautiful place.

As the title suggests, her lesson to the reader is that: “But as you pass through this land of solitude and sunsets, you will leave no sign at all. You take memories in your heart, images in your journal, and behind, you leave only ripples.”

4. *A Mother’s Journey*, by Sandra Markle, illustrated by Alan Marks (Charlesbridge); Kindergarten-Grade 2.



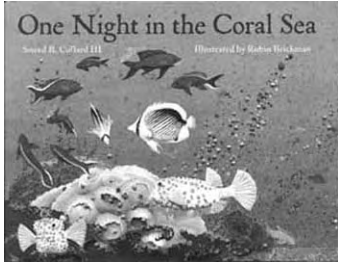
This lovely book about the long and difficult journey of a female emperor penguin to find food for her first-born chick is beautifully written and illustrated. Sandra Markle’s text never resorts to sentimentality but instead uses simple but elegant language that shows enormous respect for an extraordinary creature. The soft watercolors by Alan



Luncheon honorees accept award certificates from Young Reader panel judge Illyssa Gillman (at right in the photographs). Left to right: Robin Brickman, illustrator of *One Night in the Coral Sea*; Patricia J. Wynne, illustrator of *The Bumblebee Queen*; and Cathy Dawson, editor at Harcourt, publisher of *Hotel Deep*.  
Photo by Jackie Beckett

Marks are perfectly chosen to accompany the text and to show the austere beauty of the harsh landscape and seas of Antarctica. The author's note at the end of this book helps one understand the challenges faced in writing about this subject.

5. *One Night in the Coral Sea*, by Sneed B. Collard III, illustrated by Robin Brickman (Charlesbridge); Grades 3-6.



Once a year, on a spring evening in the Great Barrier Reef, the coral of over a hundred species release their eggs and sperm into the sea. The author had the rare fortune of observing this release. The complexity and wonder of this event

is well served by an interesting, fact-filled but never boring text and extraordinary illustrations. The illustrations are amazing, hand-colored, paper sculptures that give depth and a sense of realism to the multitude of corals, plants, and animals on the pages of this book. Additional information of Coral Mass Spawning is provided at the end along with a helpful Glossary of terms used.

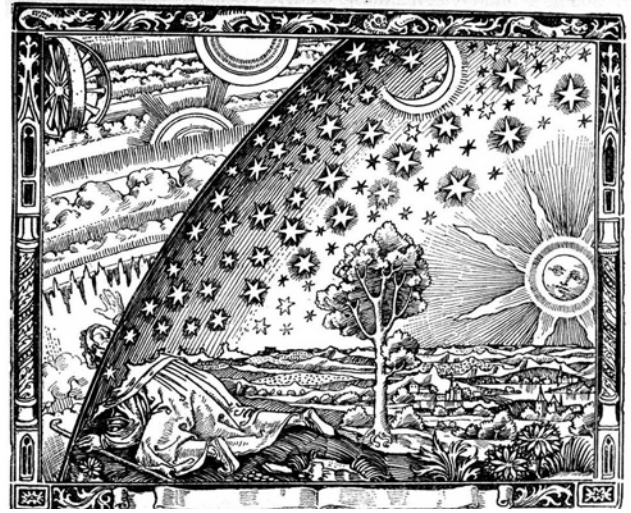
## Remarks by Kurt Cyrus

author and illustrator of *Hotel Deep*

My hope for *Hotel Deep* is that it will engage kids by prodding their sense of wonder. I can't think of a better way to inspire interest in our natural world. While the book does contain some nuggets of information and observation, I tried to balance that with an equal measure of mystery.

The idea grew from slim beginnings: a much-abused clamshell I found washed up on the beach of Nantucket Sound twenty-five years ago. What first appeared ugly became spectacular at second glance. The shell resembled that familiar woodcut depicting a kneeling, medieval man poking his head through the sky and gazing up at the wonders of the universe. The ridges along the arc of the clam shell formed the sky. Countless tiny holes, drilled by some marine predator, became stars. Squiggly tubeworms formed clouds. And two or three circular shells clinging to the clam made perfect little planets. That shell touched off years of sketching and scribbling, eventually culminating in *Hotel Deep*.

I'm glad you weren't put off by the liberties I took with nature. Some of the creatures in this hotel have been granted the power of speech, something often frowned upon in nature books. The fish use their words to express what I believe to be their true urges and instincts. The porcupine fish really would rather



flee than fight; he just isn't as articulate about it in nature as he is in this book.

I salute the John Burroughs mission of awakening the interest of young naturalists, and am proud to have *Hotel Deep* added to your list. Thank you.

## Acceptance Remarks by Judith Larner Lowry

Winner of the 2005 Nature Essay Award

I wish that circumstances allowed me to join you to express my gratitude for your recognition of my essay. I'm appreciative that Tara Rae Gunter is able to read these words on behalf of *Orion* and myself, and I'd also like to thank Aina Barten, H. Emerson Blake, and Laird Townsend from *Orion* magazine for working with me on this and other pieces with care and skill.

Receiving this award has led me to investigate John Burroughs's writings, and that has been a pleasure. I have long been of the mind that study of and commitment to a particular place not only leads to a rewarding life but is essential to meet the challenges we face. This principle has been summarized by Gary Snyder's well-known dictum "Don't move." I was impressed to realize how much John Burroughs, referred to by one biographer as the Catskills child, personified this ideal. In some circles, we who align ourselves with it are known as bioregionalists, a term which has sometimes been defined as people who fly around telling other people not to move.

It can be difficult for a person who revels in the natural world to limit their investigations and allegiances. I have often noted with interest the number of nature writers who, deeply identified with one place, on the back of their book jackets also claim another as home. Interesting combinations include: Kentucky and Arizona, California and Vermont, Wyoming and New York, Santa Fe and Buffalo. Lester Rowntree,

supreme advocate of California's flora and strongly identified with California, described this phenomenon, saying of her early childhood days in England, "I drool when I think of English wildflowers. I am a hog for nature."



Tara Rae Gunter, Assistant Editor at Orion magazine, right, accepts essay award certificate from JBA board member Joan Burroughs. Photo by Jackie Beckett

Being a hog for nature myself led me to attempt my own bi-coastal existence, which eventually I gave up in favor of narrowing and deepening my focus in northern California. Yet the visceral sensations of being in the woods and pastures of the Taconic Mountains in New York State can return at a moment's notice, evoking a painful longing for what might have been. Reading Burroughs, with all his attentive detail, I am to some extent given back the eastern life I might have lived. In his essay "Strawberries," he says he was "a famous berry-picker when a boy." I myself have gathered wild strawberries on both coasts, but only in California have I lived long enough to know which birdsong causes them to ripen.

Right before I learned of this award, I happened to be reading a book co-written by Edwin Way Teale and Ann Zwinger. In the introduction to *A Conscious Stillness*, they mention that they met at one of the John Burroughs Association meetings. Just as I wonder what I might have learned had I stayed in the East, so I wonder whom I might have met had I been able to attend this meeting—people engaged in keeping John Burroughs's works and the story of his life available to those who would be nourished by them, and in giving the gift of being associated with his name. To the judges, and to all the members of this group, thank you.

## Excerpt from the Winning Essay

By Judith Lowry

In the fall, we pack seeds, working on a long, well-oiled table made from the rootstock of a native California walnut tree, onto which was grafted English walnut. Milled and planed, the figure in the wood reflects that history, being rich and dark at the rootstock end and lighter and creamier at the grafted end. On this shining surface, the three of us measure out, with spoons, cups, scales, and fingers, seeds of California native plants. We package them and make them ready for shipping to our customers—backyard restoration gardeners, volunteers working in public parks, botanic gardens around the world, academic researchers—to make more ceanothus, toyon, baby-blue-eyes, coast live oak. To make more purple needlegrass, goldfields, gum plant, and pink flowering currant. More wildflowers, more bunchgrasses, more native trees and shrubs. We join the ants, birds, wind, water, and other agents of dispersal to increase the presence of native plant communities where once they might have flourished, or where they grow now in a diminished state.

Next to the walnut table is a bulletin board to which is affixed lists of seeds that need to be collected each season. The lists are compiled from what we see ripening in the native plant garden, from memory, from data recorded in looseleaf notebooks that date back twenty-seven years, and from notes scribbled on my collecting envelopes. On a shelf against the opposite wall, rows of these large brown envelopes are arranged alphabetically by the botanical name of the seed they contain. Written on each well-worn envelope are collection dates, locations, and also the amount of seed to be put in each packet, the quantity based on germination rates and the time involved in collection.

One envelope tells a tale of collection anxiety, where first I believe I have missed the harvest and then find that I have not. I was after the seed of vanilla grass, *Hierochloe occidentale*. Ten miles north, at the top of a wooded hill, the seed had already dropped to the forest floor, but grasses growing in openings midway down the hill contained ample ripe seed. Although I know this pattern, every year I forget, and, until I consult the notes on the envelope, begin to imagine the disappointed customer who will not be able to grow this unassuming plant with the intoxicating fragrance in its leaves and flowers. The envelope also tells me that two collections were made one month apart and that I particularly enjoyed the second collection date, when not only were more ripe vanilla grass seeds available, but also—an added inducement—evergreen huckleberries were ripe in the same Bishop pine woodland.

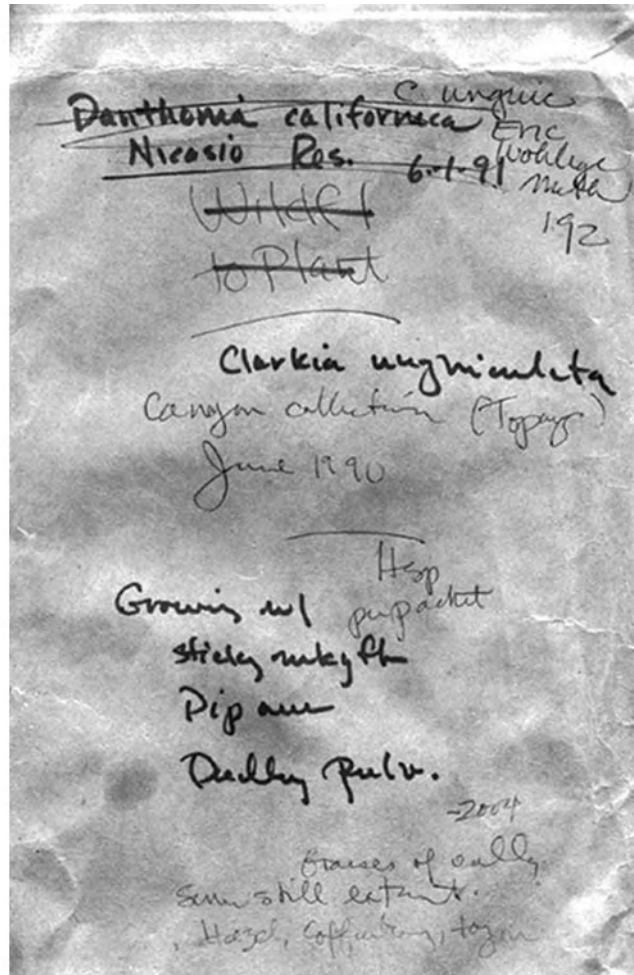
I plan a huckleberry-gathering day, but want to aim for midharvest. Too early in the season and we spend precious time removing the green berries, too

late and pickings will be slim, or the berries will have vanished for another whole year. I check out the vanilla grass growing in my garden, and see that about half of the seeds have fallen, so up north, where seeds usually ripen later, the seed stalks will still be full. According to the notes on my seed envelope, the huckleberry bushes will probably still be loaded also. In this way my backyard restoration garden functions as a calendar, informing me when it is time to go out to wild land, which seed envelopes to bring, and when to clean the berry buckets.

Using one ripening to predict another was a half-conscious experience till I read the work of ethnobotanists Trevor Lantz and Nancy Turner, writing on phenology, the timing of lifecycle events. They describe in eloquent detail a system of seasonal reminders used by some British Columbian tribes. Natural phenomena that are relatively easy to experience, like flowers, like ripe berries, like birdsong, reliably occur at the same time as other phenomena more difficult to observe, like roots ripening underground, like salmon leaving the ocean and beginning to move up the rivers and creeks. Plants and animals nearby, the so-called indicator species, tell of others farther away.

In this carefully recorded lore, events of great subtlety may signal when it is time to harvest vital resources. When Douglas fir cones shed the golden dust of their pollen, the chartreuse cambium of ponderosa pine that lies hidden beneath the outer bark is ready to remove for drying and then pounding into flour. The birth of mule deer fawns signals the ripening underground of avalanche lily bulbs.

Some Northwest Coast tribes connected the silvery, flutelike call of Swainson's thrush, which also rises up through our moist coastal forests farther south, with the ripening of salmonberries. The breeding song of *Hylocichla ustulata* was thought to awaken the berries and cause them to ripen. Mature salmonberries in turn indicated that the salmon were leaving the ocean to begin their freshwater journey from the mouth of the rivers and creeks inland; salmon harvest could



begin. The bird we have named after English naturalist William Swainson was known to these tribes as the salmonberry bird.

This information inspires me to find a sunny spot in the garden in which to plant salmonberry, a species with which I am not very familiar, but which also grows in this region. *Rubus spectabilis* is a brambly thicket-former bearing large, showy red flowers on bare stems in the spring. I want to taste their raspberry-like fruits, and see what bird-song sings them into ripeness here.

Contemplating this profoundly different way of marking the seasons allows my mind to float free from date books and Palm Pilots and imagine, if only for one recharging moment, the freedom to take in natural phenomena as life's main event.

© 2005 Judith Larner Lowry. Reprinted by permission of the author. Judith Larner Lowry works with private landowners and gardeners to restore native habitat and is the author of *Gardening with a Wild Heart* (1999) and the forthcoming *Landscaping Ideas of Jays* (2006), both published by the University of California Press. She lives in Bolinas, California. For information on Judith Larner Lowry's seeds and related publications see [www.larnerseeds.com/](http://www.larnerseeds.com/) or write Larner Seeds, P.O. Box 407, Bolinas, California 94924



Orion is published bimonthly by the Orion Society and the Myrin Institute. For information see [www.orionmagazine.org](http://www.orionmagazine.org) or write to Orion, 187 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

## In Remembrance of an Apostle of the Out-of-Doors

Recently I was perusing a book that belonged to my mother, who apparently received it at Wohelo, a girls' camp she attended in the mid-1920s (founded in 1907, the historic camp is celebrating its 100th summer on Sebago Lake, Maine). The book is *Services for the Open*, arranged by Laura I. Mattoon and Helen D. Bragdon (New York and London: The Century Co., 1923). The foreword explains that the services "are designed primarily for camps, for use in schools during the outdoor seasons of the year, or for any group of people who wish, in the spirit of sunshine and great spaces, to worship 'the God of the open air.'" Further, it was felt that in such services there is a rightful place "for the inspirations of seers and poets down to the present time." Combining hymns, prayers, and quotations, various services are set out for "special occasions," "the Kingdom of Nature," "high points," and "in remembrance of apostles of the out-of-doors." Complete services are provided for four apostles of the out-of-doors: Jesus Christ, Theodore Roosevelt, John Burroughs, and Alice Freeman Palmer. Other suggested candidates are Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir, Louis Agassiz, Henry Thoreau, Linnaeus, John Greenleaf Whittier, John J. Audubon, James Henry Huxley, William Wordsworth, and Asa Gray. Following is the service for Burroughs, based mostly on his writings from *Time and Change*, *Ways of Nature*, *Among the Wild Flowers*, *A Snow Storm*, *Exhilaration of the Road*, and his beloved poem *Waiting*.

—Vittorio Maestro

or later to come your way.

*Leader:* We cannot pursue any natural study with love and enthusiasm without the object of it becoming a part of our lives.

*In Unison:* The birds, the flowers, the trees, the rocks, all become linked with our lives and hold the key to our thoughts and emotions.

*Spokesman:* To take birds (for instance), out of my life would be like lopping off so many branches from the tree; there is so much less surface of leafage to absorb the sunlight and bring my spirits in contact with the vital currents.

*In Unison:* But I am not preaching much of a gospel, am I? Only the gospel of contentment, of appreciation, of heeding simple near-by things. A gospel the burden of which still is love, but love that goes hand in hand with understanding.

Hymn: *Summer Suns Are Glowing* (Stanza 3)

A True See-er.

*Leader:* Good observers are probably about as rare as good poets. Accurate seeing,—an eye that takes in the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,—how rare indeed it is.

*In Unison:* So few persons know or can tell exactly what they see, so few persons can draw a right inference from an observed fact. Most of us, in observing the wild life about us, see more or see less than the truth.

*Leader:* Unadulterated, unsweetened observations are what the real nature craves. . . . But in natural history there is no need to counterfeit the truth; the reality always suffices, if you have eyes to see it and ears to hear it. Behold, what Maeterlinck makes out of the life of a bee, simply by getting at and portraying the facts—a true wonderbook, the enchantment of poetry wedded to the authority of science.

Burroughs' Own Observations. (*Reading by Spokesman.*)

The Song Sparrow. I stood one day by a trout stream, and suspended my fishing for several minutes to watch a song sparrow that was singing on a dry twig before me. He had five distinct songs, each as markedly different from the others as any human songs, which he repeated one after the other.

The Toad. I have seen the toad go into the ground in the late fall. It is an interesting proceeding. It literally elbows its way into the soil. It sits on end, and works and presses with the sharp joints of its folded legs until it has sunk itself at a sufficient depth, which is only a few inches beneath the surface.

A Common Wild Flower. Our columbine is at all times

Hymn: *Summer Suns Are Glowing* [William Walsham How – Samuel Smith]

*John Burroughs and What He Was*

A Great Nature Lover.

*Leader:* Except ye become in a measure as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of Nature.

*Spokesman:* I myself have never made a dead set at studying Nature with note-book and field glass in hand. I have rather visited with her. . . . A too strenuous pursuit defeats itself.

*In Unison:* In the fields and woods more than anywhere else all things come to those who wait, because all things are on the move, and are sure sooner

and places one of the most exquisitely beautiful of flowers; yet one spring day, when I saw it growing out of a small seam of rock where no soil or mould was visible,—a jet of foliage and color shooting out of a black line on the face of a perpendicular mountain wall and rising up like a tiny fountain, its drops turning to flame-colored jewels that hung and danced in the air against the gray rocky surface,—its beauty became something magical and audacious.

#### A Word Painter.

1. The Yosemite. (*Reading by Leader.*) The approach to it up the Merced River does not prepare one for any such astonishing spectacle as awaits one. The rushing, foaming water amid the tumbled confusion of huge granite rocks and the open V-shaped valley, are nothing very remarkable or unusual. Then suddenly you are on the threshold of this hall of the elder gods. Demons and furies might lurk in the valley below, but here is the abode of the serene, beneficent Olympian deities. All is so calm, so hushed, so friendly, yet so towering, so stupendous, so unspeakably beautiful. You are in a mansion carved out of the granite foundations of the earth, with walls two or three thousand feet high, hung here and there with snow-white waterfalls, and supporting the blue sky on domes and pinnacles still higher. Oh, the calmness and majesty of the scene! the evidence of such tremendous activity of some force, some agent, and now so tranquil, so sheltering, so beneficent.

2. Nature in the Tropics. Nature in the tropics left to herself, is harsh, aggressive, savage; looks as though she wanted to hang you with her dangling ropes, or impale you on her thorns, or engulf you in her ranks of gigantic ferns. Her mood is never as placid and sane as in the North. There is a tree in the Hawaiian woods that suggests a tree gone mad. It is called the hau-tree. It lies down, squirms, and wriggles all over the *ground* like a wounded snake; it gets up and then takes to earth again. Now it wants to be a vine, now it wants to be a tree. It throws somersaults, it makes itself into loops and rings, it rolls, it reaches, it doubles upon itself. Altogether it is the craziest vegetable growth I ever saw. Where you can get it up off the ground and let it perform its antics on a broad skeleton framework, it makes a cover that no sunbeam can penetrate, and forms a living roof to the most charming verandas or “lanais,” as they are called in the islands—that one can wish to see.

3. A Snow Storm. We love the sight of the brown and ruddy earth; it is the color of life, while a snow-covered plain is the face of death; yet snow is but the mark of life-giving rain; it, too, is the friend of man—the tender, sculpturesque, immaculate, warming, fertilizing snow.

Hymn: *All Beautiful the March of Days* [Frances Whitmarsh Wile – Frederick H. Cheeswright]

#### A Quiet Humorist. (*Reading by Spokesman.*)

“Johnny” in the Grand Canyon. It is quite worth-while to go down into the canyon on muleback, if only to fall in love with a mule, and to learn what a sure-footed, careful, and docile creature, when he is on his good-behavior, a mule can be. My mule was named “Johnny,” and there was soon a good understanding between us. I quickly learned to turn the whole problem of that perilous descent over to him. He knew how to take the sharp turns and narrow shelves of that steep zigzag much better than I did. I do not fancy that the thought of my safety was “Johnny’s” guiding star; his solicitude struck nearer home than that. There was much ice and snow on the upper part of the trail, and only those slender little legs of “Johnny’s” stood between me and a tumble of two or three thousand feet. How cautiously he felt his way with his little feet, as, with lowered head, he seemed to be scanning the trail critically. Only when he swung around the sharp elbows of the trail did his forefeet come near the edge of the brink. Only once or twice at such times, as we hung for a breath above the terrible incline, did I feel a slight shudder. One of my companions, who had never before been upon an animal’s back, so fell in love with her “Sandy” that she longed for a trunk big enough in which to take him home with her.

The American Walks. When I see the discomforts that able-bodied American men will put up with rather than go a mile or half a mile on foot, the abuses they will tolerate and encourage, crowding the street car on a little fall in the temperature or the appearance of an inch of snow, packing up to overflowing, dangling to the straps, treading on each other’s toes, breathing each other’s breaths, crushing the women and children, hanging by tooth and nail to a square inch of the platform, imperiling their limbs and killing the horses, I think the commonest tramp in the street has good reason to felicitate himself on his rare privilege of going afoot.

I notice with astonishment that at our fashionable watering-places nobody walks; that, of all those vast crowds of health-seekers and lovers of the country air, you can never catch one in the fields or woods, or guilty of trudging along the country road with dust on his shoes and sun-tan on his hands and face. The sole amusement seems to be to eat and dress and sit about the hotels and glare at each other. The men look bored, the women look tired, and all seem to sigh, “Oh, Lord! what shall we do to be happy and not be vulgar?”

I fear also, the American is becoming disqualified for the manly art of walking by a falling off in the size of his foot. A small, trim foot, well-booted or gaitered, is the national vanity. How we stare at the

big feet of foreigners, and wonder what may be the price of leather in those countries and where all the aristocratic blood is, that these plebeian extremities so predominate. . . . A little foot never yet supported a great character.

### An Apostle of Simplicity.

*Leader:* For my part as I grow older, I am more and more inclined to reduce my baggage, to lop off superfluities. I become more and more in love with simple things and simple folk—a small house, a hut in the woods, a tent on the shore. The show and splendor of great houses, elaborate furnishings, stately halls, oppress me, impose upon me. They fix the attention upon false values, they set up a false standard of beauty; they stand between me and the real feeders of character and thought. A man needs a good roof over his head winter and summer, and a good chimney and a good wood-pile in the winter. The more open his four walls are, the more fresh air he will get, and the longer he will live.

*Spokesman:* He was the simplest man I ever knew, simpler than a child; for children are often self-conscious and uninterested, whereas Burroughs's interest and curiosity grew with the years, and his directness, his spontaneity, his instant pleasure and his constant joy in living, his utter naturalness and naïveté amounted to genius.

### A Gentle Philosopher.

*Leader:* Our lives consist, not in the number of things we know, any more than in the number of things we possess.

*In Unison:* But in the things we love, in the depth and sincerity of our emotions, and in the elevation of our aspirations.

*Leader:* What any given work yields us depends largely upon what we bring to it.

*In Unison:* That I am a saner, healthier, more contented man, with truer standards of life, for all my loitering in the fields and woods, I am fully convinced.

### A Letter to All Young Friends

*Spokesman:* “My dear young Friends:—The most precious things of life are near at hand, without money and without price. Each of you has the whole wealth of the universe at your very doors; all that I ever had and still have may be yours by stretching forth your hand and taking it.”

Hymn: *Hark, Hark, My Soul!* [Frederick W. Faber – Henry Smart]

### Waiting

#### *In Unison:*

Serene, I fold my hands and wait;  
Nor care for wind, nor tide, nor sea;  
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate,  
For, lo! my own shall come to me.

#### *Leader:*

I stay my haste, I make delays,  
For what avails this eager pace?  
I stand amid the eternal ways,  
And what is mine shall know my face.

Asleep, awake, by night or day,  
The friends I seek are seeking me;  
No wind can drive my bark astray,  
Nor change the tide of destiny.

Hymn. *Hark, Hark, My Soul!* (Stanzas 3, 4.)

#### *Spokesman:*

What matter if I stand alone?  
I wait with joy the coming years;  
My heart shall reap where it hath sown,  
And garner up its fruit of tears.

The waters know their own and draw  
The brook that springs in yonder heights;  
So flows the good with equal law  
Unto the soul of pure delights.

#### *In Unison:*

The stars come nightly to the sky;  
The tidal wave unto to the sea;  
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,  
Can keep my own away from me.

Hymn: *Hark, Hark, My Soul!* (Stanza 5.)

### Prayer.

*In Unison:* We thank Thee, O Lord, for the things that are out of doors; for the fresh air and the open sky and the growing grass and the tiny flowers and the setting sun and the wooded hill and the rolling surf and the brown earth beneath our feet. They are all good and they all speak the truth, and we rest ourselves and get new strength to go back to the world of restless men. Keep us ever like the good world, rugged and wholesome and true.



*Wake-Robin* Volume 39, Number 1, Summer 2006

### Featuring Highlights of the JBA Awards Luncheon

Medal Winner: Donald Kroodsma Review by Jan DeBlieu.....	1
Birding with Tim Gallagher By Joan Burroughs.....	2
The John Burroughs Nature Books for Young Readers for 2005 Review by Marcia L. Dworak.....	4
Winner of the 2005 Nature Essay Award Acceptance remarks by Judith Larner Lowry....	6
Excerpt from the Winning Essay.....	7
In Remembrance of an Apostle of the Out-of- Doors.....	9

### Wake-Robin

John Burroughs Association, Inc.  
American Museum of Natural History  
15 West 77 Street  
New York, NY 10024

Forwarding and return postage guaranteed  
Address correction requested

First Class Postage



In This Issue  
John Burroughs Association  
Literary Awards for 2005

### Calendar

**Saturday, September 16, 10:00 A.M.**—John Burroughs Sanctuary Ramble (7th Annual Hudson River Valley Ramble). Meet at Sanctuary gate. Registration suggested (telephone 845-384-6320 or e-mail inarcadia@yahoo.com).

**Saturday, October 7, 12 Noon**—Fall Slabsides Day. Evan Pritchard will give a talk on “Trees, a Native American Solution to Global Warming.”

The John Burroughs Association informs members through *Wake-Robin* and the Web site <http://research.amnh.org/burroughs>. Occasionally, we reach out via e-mail with news alerts and reminders. Please send your e-mail address to the Secretary ([breslof@amnh.org](mailto:breslof@amnh.org)) so that we can better serve you. Members are encouraged to submit articles or news items for publication. Deadline for submissions to the Fall 2006 issue of *Wake-Robin* is **November 3**. Direct inquiries to the editors.