

## My Wild Garden

I grew up in the North Woods of Wisc. where I would roam free through those wild woods and fields with only my imagination and curiosity to accompany me, well some times also a dog at home on the ranch or my pal Arnold Pete, an Oneida Indian, during recess in the school woods. I was already an anachronism, a free running boy of nature while others were playing organized games.



white: 4 O'clock, yellow & maroon:  
Mexican Hats,

But when the family moved back to Milwaukee I was conscripted as a gardener and as I was weeding mowing raking I visualized life in the Wilds where I let Nature take her own course. That became my vision, my goal.

When Kathryn and I retired to our 100 year old little mud house in original Vegas in 2006 I was determined to follow my vision. I ripped out the neglected front lawn of non-native grasses; scattered a variety of seeds of native plants I enjoyed into the left-hand, 7x9 foot section; and for the most part let Nature take her own course there. She did a fascinating job. Every year depending on prior temperature and precipitation and my and nature's continuing

seed dispersal the garden is different, during the year there is a continual change of colors as different flowers come into season.

This year, 2019, the garden was dominated by one large ten foot many branched Prairie Sunflower (*Helianthus petiolaris*), which grew right next to the concrete walk from house to street. It was taking advantage that space of access to our humble adobe abode to spread its many branches, requiring guying the main stem and trimming many lateral branches allowing the postman and guest entry. Just that one Prairie Sunflower was for me a fascinating lesson in ecological inter-dependence between flora and fauna, that is ignoring what goes on below ground with fungi and microbes.



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Even before the flowering, aphids and attendant wee black ants found a livelihood on the leaves. The aphids insert their proboscis into the plants circulatory system, the plant pumps its sap through the insect which uses all it needs for life and excretes the excess fluid and carbohydrates as honey dew. The ants harvest the honey dew for their colony and protect the aphids in return. Then appear the wasps, mainly EU Paper Wasp workers who nest in our garage, but many different species.

They need the calories to fuel their search for water and wood fiber for the growing nest and meat for the growing larvae.

Wasps probably do partake of the unlimited aphids—early on aphids reproduce females asexually (parthenogenesis) so populations can explode—as food for their larval sisters, though I have yet to see an actual taking. I have seen an ant David charge a wasp and scare him off and I have seen a wasp Goliath just step on a charging wee ant. Ladybug beetles and their larvae do take aphids as their principle diet.



*European Paper Wasp  
(Polistes dominula)*



*Bee Fly*

The blooming flowers furnish nectar and pollen to a wide variety of beings, including bees, wasps, beetles, flies in exchange for pollinating the flowers. An interesting fly is the Bee Fly (*Bombylius fraudulentus*) whose Latin name means Fraudulent Bumble Bee for with her big fuzzy coat she sort of looks like a Bumble Bee, though those long legs and proboscis give her away. She sips nectar but she also hangs around the flowers until a solitary bee turns up for nectar and pollen for herself and her larval descendant. The fly then follows the bee to its burrow

deposits an egg near or in the burrow. The resultant parasitic maggot dines on the bee larva, while the larva dines on the pollen and nectar left by its mother but ultimately dies as it is consumed.

Another fly found is the Sunflower Seed Maggot Fruit Fly (*Neotephritis finalis*). Not like the the tiny fly attracted to our spoiled fruits which is a Vinegar Fly but a larger fly with distinctive pattered or *Picture Wings*. Ours lays its eggs in the flower head where the resulting maggot feeds, pupates and as now a fly mates etc, etc.



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Spiders also take advantage of the sunflower's attracting all manner of good beings to eat. This year two Cat-faced spiders took up residence under the eaves, spreading their large webs to either side of the sunflower, dining on a delectable variety of bees wasps and butterflies flying to and fro. Mornings I liked going out onto the portal to greet them and then when they have caught something, identifying their meal. They both stayed 'till the killing frosts of October. At



*Cat-faced spider with prey*

my breakfast I saw this one drop down to to kill her breakfast of what I know not for she had it wrapped up by the time I got there with the camera.



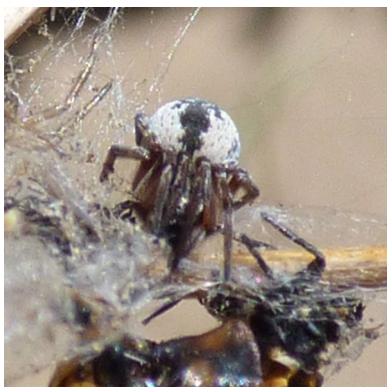
*Marbled Orbweaver  
small 9-20 mm.*

I saw a Marbled Orbweaver for the first time when she spread her web between the flower's lateral branches that hung over the walkway. I suppose that she became annoyed with the coming and going of those great human beings for she moved her snare to the back yard where I later found her. Like marble their patterns are most varied, this is the most common look in the US.

Jumping spiders use the sunflower as a hunting ground. I saw two new to me on the foliage, the Chera and the Phoenix (*Metaphidippus chera?* & *Phidippus phoenix*), scanning the foliage for prey. When they spy something, they attach silk to their look-out, then spinning a silken safety line they spring out over the void between them, hopefully capturing their next meal, but if they miss they have a life line back to their perch. More frequently than spiders I see the forbs, shrubs and trees festooned with these silken lines.



*Chera, c.4mm long  
in plastic carry case*



On 15 June 2019 09:51, while cleaning out the wild garden I chanced upon this Colorado Dictynid (*Dictyna coloradensis*) a Mesh Web Weaver on a dead stalk at the home base of her web with all the remains of her former meals. Unfortunately I had already pulled the stalk from the ground before discovering her, but did return her to the garden.

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In the fall the birds come for the sunflower seeds. First on the set are the resident Lesser Goldfinches and House Finches, then migrating Wilson's and MacGillivray's Warblers and Clay-colored sparrows stop by to refuel with those delicious nutritious seeds and the aphids too. The MacGillivray's warblers and Clay-colored Sparrows I saw here for the first time ever, adding them to my list. I even saw a born-to-feeders House Sparrow, noticing all the commotion on the sunflower, leave the feeders and join in on the feast. Snow in the mountains will bring the Juncos to come down to Vegas for the winter to feed on our seed bearing flower stalks.



*Lesser Goldfinch*



*House Finch*



*Wilson's Warbler*



*MacGillivray's Warbler F*

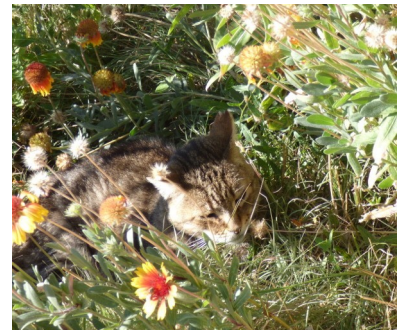


*Clay-colored Sparrow*



*Dark-eyed Junco*

And so Nature's beings come to me, but remember Nature is not our slave or inexhaustible cupboard but our home in which we live, hopefully in harmony with all its varied beings, and for at least as long as we can maintain our existence in this ever changing environment, changing due in part to our blind destructive interactions with it.



*Ragged Ear  
one of our feral? cats*

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### A Mason Wasp, *Vespidae: Pterocheilus sp.*

I walked out onto the *portal* with camera to the sunflower, a towering ten foot or more behemoth to see what was going-on on besides the usual suspects up to the usual capers. I found there a wasp I did not recognize acting strangely. She was digging into the disk of a sunflower at eye height. Why? Was she going to make a brood chamber? No! That's silly it would have to last the winter. What than was she doing?



I started to photograph. She was using her abdomen to leverage her head down into the hole she was digging, occasionally scraping out debris onto the rays below, and more occasionally she would back out and clean her antennae. She was working hard and steady, I kept observing and shooting.

After 16 minutes she started inching out. It was a struggle for her long mandibles were gripping a large pink and white longitudinally striped caterpillar of a Sunflower moth (*Pyralidea: Homoeosoma electella*). After rearranging it, mandibles gripping the head, legs the body, she took off to I assume a prepared chamber in a hole in the ground or somewhere else where she will lay an egg on or in the future food bank of her descendant-to-be.

