

Nature Trails

Published by the Eugene Natural History Society

Volume Forty-four, Number Six, September 2009



**Mr. Charles Goodrich, MFA, Program Director,
The Spring Creek Project, Department of Philosophy,
Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon
“New Pests Every Day: A Gardener-Poet’s
Adventures in Natural History”**

**Friday, 18 September 2009, 7:30PM, Room 100,
Willamette Hall, UO Campus**

Were I limited to one descriptor for him I would say, “Charles Goodrich is a gardener.” Yes, he’s an author, poet, carpenter, cook, husband, father, and a keen observer of the natural world, but at bottom, growing these many talents, is a gardener.

If you listen to “The Writer’s Almanac” on NPR you may have heard some of Charles’s poems. Garrison Keillor has read several, from the collection entitled Insects of South Corvallis. Another of his books, The Practice of Home, a collection of essays, reveals much about the man. In closing the prologue of this book Goodrich writes, “I built a house. I botched a lot of things, but all in all it came out all right. Let me tell you about it.” In the telling he gets at much more than carpentry.

Charles Goodrich was born in Evanston, Illinois, and grew up in Illinois and Ohio, living in several small towns (He went to twelve different schools before finishing high school in Oxford, Ohio). As a youngster his most important tie to outdoor life was the time – several summers – he spent working on his uncle’s farm. It was there the seeds of his own garden were sown, and one of the earliest fruits was pride in work well done.

Charles was an undergraduate at Heidelberg College, in Tiffin, Ohio. He went in as a math/physics major and came out with a BA in philosophy, a minor in math and a budding talent as a poet. The connection between science and philosophy that is central to his present position as Program Director of the Spring Creek Project was thus strong early on.

The summer after graduating from Heidelberg, Charles worked in Denali National Park, where, among other adventures, he met a girl from Oregon. The summer job over, he followed her back to Oregon, arriving in Portland on the day of a huge celebration – the opening of Waterfront Park. Twenty thousand revelers on the banks of the Willamette, celebrating the closing of a four-lane highway to make room for this wonderful public place – how could he not be impressed? He became an Oregonian on the spot.

A few months later, having concluded that with a degree in philosophy and some farm experience he could be a crackerjack gardener, he took out a map and circled the green spots close to where he was living. The first one he visited was Marylhurst

Convent in Lake Oswego. The nuns hired him as their groundskeeper. With 200 acres to tend, Charles did everything: mowed grass, herded and fed cattle, maintained the sewage-treatment plant, dug graves, grew flowers for the altar, grew vegetables for the kitchen, and tried to resurrect the 100-acre fruit orchard. His favorite activity there was working in the flower garden with Sister Josephine-Agnes. She was old school, an organic gardener way before there was such a term. She taught him a lot. In the old days the convent had been largely self-sufficient, and Charles almost immediately had the urge to go back to those ways. He expanded the vegetable garden, tormenting the food-service staff with mountains of fresh produce when they were accustomed to using the can opener.

After about three years at Marylhurst Charles moved to the Children’s Farm Home, between Albany and Corvallis, where he again was the groundskeeper, again for three years. While there he planted another large vegetable garden, and got the kids to help him with it: good for all parties concerned.

He then began work for the Benton County Parks, as the gardener in charge of the county courthouse grounds. He enjoyed this position for 15 years, working half time, which left him time to pursue his writing career. In 1999, after his third knee surgery, he finally admitted that his body was saying “Enough. No more making a living on these knees.” He got an MFA in creative writing from Oregon State University in 2002 and now holds the position of Program Director of the Spring Creek Project. And, of course, he still writes.

After having read this you may wonder what Charles Goodrich will have to say that relates to natural history. In a recent essay, entitled “The Gardener Gets Arrested”, he says, “Hiking, camping, canoeing, I’m always on the lookout for insects, birds, reptiles, mammals, interesting plants, rocks, seeds, scats, tracks, or cloud formations. I relish my recreational encounters with nature, and I try to smartly observe the daily lives of the animals and plants I meet. But I’m even more likely to encounter nature when I’m working in the garden, when I’m stabbing nature with my spade, whacking nature with a hoe or a scythe. I go to my backyard to wrestle with nature, to make nature say vegetables. When I’m working in the garden, I’m attentive, but selectively, so I see what I’m looking for quite clearly, but I’m utterly blind to most everything else. Unless, that is, a



wild creature arrests me. Unless something unusual penetrates my willful concentration, punctuates my headlong, purposeful equilibrium. Then, the little world I'm attending to stops, and bulges into mystery. A chickadee! A centipede! A snake! The unexpectedness of small animals is part of their charm. They are not my quarry. I'm not seeking them out to add to a life-list. They aren't the answer to my bird- or bug-watching intentions. They are free agents, in no way bound to my will. They are suddenly just *there*. Inexhaustibly interesting and ultimately unknowable, they are abundant, everyday epiphanies."

To garden the way he does – sustainably, with no synthetic crutches – takes ecological insight. Charles knows ecosystems, whether the micro variety such as the hidden world in the gaps between the boards of his kitchen floor (they were tight when he laid them but the wood has since shrunk), the riparian zone along the river close to his house, the developing forest his community created out of farmland the city had bought, or his own garden. He knows about good bugs and bad ones, good plants and bad ones, he sees how we're all in this together, and he can make you laugh or almost weep the way he puts words together.

Please join us for an enjoyable, uplifting evening with Charles Goodrich, plantsman and poet, on Friday, 18 September 2009, at 7:30 pm in room 100, Willamette Hall, on the University of Oregon campus. The title of his presentation is "New Pests Every Day: A Gardener-Poet's Adventures in Natural History."

John Carter

Prelude to Change by Tom Titus

I love change: sunrise, sunset, spring, fall, trilliums, chanterelles, planting, and harvest. Last week I heard the lonely call of a Swainson's thrush in the September dusk, belting out a single upwardly swinging "tweet" as though summer could be hung from that note like a picture on a wall, lasting in perpetuity. Thank goodness summer isn't endless. Otherwise fall wouldn't come and I wouldn't be driven to can tomatoes, dry apples, split wood, or pick up the ever-growing piles of junk strewn around the yard and garden on the drought-inspired assumption that it's never going to rain. Ever.

We are told that time marches on, and it does after a fashion. Yet I don't find the idea of linear time, spooling out into the infinite future like some never-ending kite string, particularly helpful. Once when I was a lot younger I ventured a little too close to that precipice of infinity, teetered, then caught my balance. So while I'm happy for folks who like to

contemplate such things, I swore never to look again. These days my finger stays on the pulse of the *real* world—the one with mushrooms and flowers and thrushes and daylight that grows and shrinks—the world where time runs in circles. A wonderful thing about natural cycles is that we can have our comfortable routines and adrenaline-inspiring change all in one package.

These cycles vary tremendously in magnitude, and some have more impact on my physical, emotional, and spiritual being than others. The cycle of my day has me first stumbling out of bed to grind coffee, then contemplating new possibilities (none of these possibilities can occur without the coffee). Fall brings a feeling of urgency that sometimes gives me the butterflies, but this sense of rapid change comes about because I know the drill from autumns past. Cycles leave open the possibility of another day, another fall, a winter solstice, the return of spring.

I'm becoming comfortable with larger cycles. The cycle of my life is more apparent by the year as kids grow up, parents grow old, and my own creaky knees remind me that I won't be a runner forever, nor be around at all over the really long haul. Even larger cycles require a different level of experience and understanding. In 1966 I watched the glow of the Oxbow Burn and later saw green shoots emerge from the ash that eventually transformed blackened hillsides into a brush-covered haven for rabbits, coyotes, deer, and elk. The 40-year-old Douglas fir children that are now shading out the brush may someday grow into 300-year-old ancients, but I won't be around to see this. Rather, I can walk among those few old stands that are left and project onto the future of the young Oxbow forest a fall afternoon with softly filtering sunlight, cool humidity, and the smell of high-volume decomposition.

Still larger cycles are purely intellectual constructs to me, beyond the scope of emotion, disconnected from my spirit. I accept that species are evolving and becoming extinct, that mountains are rising and falling, and continents are coalescing, drifting apart, then reannealing. I even accept the possibility of a Stephen Hawking universe, one that expands and collapses and re-expands over a vastness of time and space that seems no longer to be time and space. In the microcosm, my understanding of the nitrogen cycle is similarly abstract; any spiritual connection to a nitrogen molecule is indirect, deriving mostly from the sweat of loading and unloading a trailer-load of Kimmel horse manure and the satisfaction of seeing 20-foot squash vines looping through and over my corn like exotic photosynthetic man-eaters (I have dreams that these monsters are twining around my

ankles while I sleep). But generally the vast macrocosm and invisible microcosm do not stir my soul as do shortening days, a cool bite on the morning bike ride to work, and the first autumn rains with their promise of chanterelles and Chinook salmon.

I can't remember when I became part of the Eugene Natural History Society, but apparently it was long enough ago that this year I was asked to be president. The high irony is that I'm not a joiner. More change. Thankfully we have structure, a board of directors with ample accumulated wisdom for keeping me on track and a cycle of traditions that mark the turning of our annual wheel. We begin this month with poet and essayist Charles Goodrich who brings to us a multifaceted approach to natural history melding science with gardening, poetry, and deep personal experience. We'll be at the Mushroom Show at Mt. Pisgah in October, and our annual December bird talk will be by crow and raven expert John Marzluff, recently interviewed on NPR. We'll celebrate the end of winter with a bike path cleanup and hopefully squint again into bright May sunshine from our booth at the Wildflower Show. Between these landmarks our path traverses geology, marine biology, turtles, and exotic species. Our yearly template is a nice combination of cyclical predictability with a little variety and chaos thrown in for pizzazz.

These days change seems to permeate our lives on every level—seasonal, social, political, economic, and environmental. Some believe that humanity is entering an era of great change. Perhaps this is true, although I wonder if the history of civilization hasn't *always* been an era of great change. In any event, we do know that stress fractures are appearing in the resource pillars that have supported a model of growth and exploitation glibly referred to as economic "progress." Difficult questions that for decades have nipped at our heels like a pesky terrier are beginning to morph into the wolf at the door. Mostly they boil down to this: how can six-and-a-half billion of us find food, water, shelter, and some level of human dignity without destroying ourselves, our fellow species, and the planetary life support that we all depend upon? While the particular answers aren't as yet clear, one thing seems certain—the foundation of humanity is the earth herself, and the book of our future, if we choose to write it, will be filled with earthbound poetry and lyrics that bubble forth continuously from an aquifer of true sustainability. This shift will demand that we connect with our fellow humans and together embrace Nature so tightly that the separation that currently dominates our minds and spirits is dissolved.

In the spirit of change, I begin our new year by offering a small challenge: that while *what we do* may remain little changed, *why we do it* perhaps stands some scrutiny. That from within the comfortable routine of our monthly lectures, great cookies, and congenial conversation we aspire to a larger vision for the role of our Society in our community, state, and regional biosphere. That we begin to embrace an expansive collective vision in which our enthusiasm for the natural world translates into wisdom about how humans might walk upon the earth. That our Society contribute in some way to the rediscovery that humans don't just inhabit the earth: we are a part of Her.

Humblebees, Honey, and Then Some, by reida Kimmel

Early this summer when our common garden variety *Ceanothus impressus* 'Victoria' bloomed, we were treated to a spectacular sight. From dawn to dusk for several weeks, the big shrub was covered with bumblebees. Some were striped black and yellow. Others were banded with rust and yellow. Someone told me that the red ones had to be males, but I knew that was wrong. Still, I felt embarrassingly ignorant about bumblebees. The Web was some help, informing me that there were seven red species in the West, and from the pictures, I guessed that our shrub was being frequented by *Bombus huntii*, as well as by one or more of the seventeen species of bumblebees in the Northwest. The Xerxes Society's website was very informative, but I was feeling most unsatisfied until I found a charming small book, Humblebee Bumblebee by Brian L. Griffin, Knox Cellars Publishing, ISBN#0-9635841-3-8. This book has a really good field guide with pictures and descriptions including comparisons of different bees' sizes. Whoa! That red bee was *Bombus melanopygus*!

Now I knew a tiny bit about the kinds of bumblebees, but the real fun was finding out the natural history. Called humblebees [from the Latin word for earth], until early in the last century, these creatures have an amazing life cycle. Most species do indeed nest in the earth but others nest above ground in grasses and woodpiles, while others nest in walls and trees. All species, however, start their life cycle with a single young newly mated queen who digs a burrow underground to hibernate from fall until early spring. Emerging to forage as early as February, the queen seeks out a ready-made nesting place such as the abandoned home of a field mouse. Using wax extruded in scale-like sheets from her abdomen, she builds a honey pot for nectar and a cell in which she

lays about eight fertilized eggs. Bumblebees are warm bodied, and the queen broods her eggs carefully, while sipping from her tiny tasty store of honey. The eggs hatch into female larva, feed voraciously on the pollen and nectar their mother brings them, and pupate seven days later. After approximately ten more days female workers emerge from these cocoons, ready to assist in feeding the next batch of larva. Interestingly, as summer goes on each succeeding brood is better fed, because of the growing population of workers, and grows into bigger worker bees. A casual observer might even think the young bees were separate species, the size difference is so noticeable. The queen now stays home, laying more and more cups full of eight eggs to produce more workers. Each worker bee only lives for a month. As summer begins to wane, the queen lays a batch of queen cells. These are very big compared to the worker cells. She also lays unfertilized eggs that will hatch into males. When these final offspring emerge from their pupae, they leave the nest forever. The young queens are huge. The males, uninterested in foraging, lay scent trails of pheromones that the young queens find. A young queen often mates with numerous males. She saves the sperm in a special sac in her abdomen for fertilizing her eggs next spring. Their duties done, the old queen, the workers and the males die. Each young queen digs her winter hibernating tunnel in the soft earth and the cycle begins again.

I learned some very interesting sad facts about bumblebees too, not just that they do not make enough honey for us! *Psithyrus* bees are in the same family as *Bombus* 'bumblebees'. They resemble bumblebees except they are heavily armored, not fuzzy, and lack those incredibly characteristic pollen baskets. In fact they are poor flyers and foragers. They are the cuckoos of the bee world. A *Psithyrus* queen will enter a nest, usually without encountering resistance, lay her eggs, and murder the bumblebee queen. The workers feed the alien larva as if they were their own sisters and raise bees that will fly away to invade and destroy other bumblebee colonies. *Psithyrus*'s parasitic lifestyle is a fact of evolution and *Bombus* can live with it. Far more distressingly, the Xerses Society reports that in the past ten years bumblebees have been in decline because of a virulent disease caused by a microsporidian, *Nosema bombi*. Bumblebees are important for pollinating a number of greenhouse crops, including tomatoes, and the disease was brought back to America by American species of bumblebees raised in European commercial bee-

raising facilities. Another totally preventable tragedy that can only anger us all!

If you are interested in attracting these lively and interesting pollinators to your garden, Griffin's book has lots of advice, including finding and moving nests, creating attractive nest sites, and planting yummy foods for these generalist feeders. Early sources of pollen and nectar are especially important. Native species like willows, filberts, and *Mahonia* fill that niche. Griffin reports that in his Northwest garden, *Rhododendron*, *Pieris*, and red clover are big hits. And don't forget to plant a *Ceanothus* if you don't already have one.

It's now the second week of September. As I weed and deadhead my sorely neglected garden, I see hundreds of honeybees foraging on the borage, goldenrod, sedum and thyme. With them are numerous species of flies and tiny swift orange butterflies. But no bumblebees! In fact I haven't seen a bumblebee in several weeks, and I have been looking. Until we gardeners started planting for fall blooms there were few or no food sources for bumblebees after mid summer. They evolved to finish their life cycle before the rainy season. Somewhere in the soft dust of former mole diggings in the hill pasture and in the earthen banks of the logging road behind the house there are hundreds of bumblebee queens sleeping in their burrows, waiting for the first flowers of spring. I look forward to their return. Meanwhile there's that nameless wee butterfly to check out. reida Kimmel

Events of Interest in the Community

Audubon Society

Tuesday, 22 September, 7:30pm. On the Wing. A documentary film by Dan Viens. Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High St., Eugene. The story of the Vaux's Swifts that frequent the chimney at Chapman Elementary School in Portland.

Mount Pisgah Arboretum

34901 Frank Parrish Rd., Eugene, 97405. Located off I-5 Exit 189, 15 minutes southeast of Eugene. Call Peg Douthit-Jackson at 747-1504 or email mtpisgjp@efn.org for more information or to sign up for any of the following Arboretum activities.

Sunday, 13 September, 1-3pm. Raptor Walk. Led by lifetime birder and naturalist Rick Ahrens. Rain or Shine. Meet at the MPA Visitors Center. Fee: \$5 (MPA members/donation).

Saturday, 19 September, 10am-noon. Fall Fruits and Foliage. Join Botanist Rhoda Love and enjoy the fall colors and learn about the adaptive strategies of plants for dealing with the coming of winter, as well as the great variety of fruits and seeds and their diverse dispersal mechanisms. Rain or Shine. Meet at the MPA Visitors Center. Fee: \$5 (MPA members/donation).

Saturday, 26 September, 9am-1pm. "Back to Basics", Practices of Yesteryear. Join Aprovecho Sustainable Forestry Instructor Matthew Hall and explore techniques of using hand tools for forestry and agricultural uses. Fee: \$30 (MPA members/\$25). Reservations required.

Saturday, 3 October, 1-4pm. Drawings with A Sense of Place. Join Natural Science Illustrator Kris Kirkeby and learn how to indicate a sense of place in your nature scenes or travel sketches. Fee: \$20 (MPA members/\$15).

Sunday, 11 October, 10am-noon. Animals and Plants are Preparing for Winter, Family Walk. Nature guide Tom Bettman leads this family-friendly walk. Rain or Shine. Meet at the MPA Visitors Center. Fee: \$5 (MPA members/donation).

Sunday, 25 October, 10am-5pm. Mushroom Festival. Do not miss this! More info next month.

Native Plant Society

Monday, 14 September, 7:30 pm. Emerald Chapter's 30th Birthday Bash. EWEB Training Room at 500 E. 4th Ave., Eugene. Charlene Simpson will present a slide show about Emerald Chapter activities, past and present, in celebration of the Chapter's 30th Anniversary. Special invitation is extended to charter members and past officers. All are invited. Call 541-746-9478.

WREN For more information on any of the following activities call 683-6494.

Saturday, 26 September, 10am-4pm. Native American Wetland Cultural Day. 751 S. Danebo Ave. Kalapuya Elder Esther Stutzman is organizing a day of activities that includes story-telling, basket-making demonstrations, drumming, dancing, camas oven demonstration, children's activities, a display about the building of the traditional Kalapuya canoe, and more. Bring a lunch, blanket, and stay for the day. Rain or shine. \$5/WREN members, \$7/non-members.

Sunday, 4 October, 11am-2pm. National Public Lands Day 2009. At Stewart Pond Natural Area. National Public Lands Day is the nation's largest hands-on volunteer effort to improve and enhance public lands. Gloves and tools will be provided. Volunteers will get a free poster, t-shirt, coupon for admission to a national park, lunch, satisfaction, and maybe a blister. Directions: From W 11th Ave., turn N onto Bertelsen Rd. Turn E onto Stewart Rd.

Friday, 9 October, 9-10am. Wetland Wander. At Golden Gardens Park, at the intersection of Golden Gardens St. and Jessen Dr., north of Barger Dr. The park was formerly a gravel pit that provided material used in the construction of Belt Line Road. WREN will provide binoculars.

Eugene/ Springfield Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association

Monday, 5 October, 7pm. Mexican Butterflies. EWEB Training Center, 500 East 4th Ave., Eugene. Travel with Professor Fred Ramsey to many locations in Western and Eastern Mexico to learn about a great diversity of butterflies. See his photos of Swallowtails, Metalmarks, and tropical Longwings, in their proper habitats. FREE and All Welcome.

Nearby Nature

Nearby Nature Fall Nature Guides Training Program: Love nature? Enjoy kids? Learn to lead school nature walks in Alton Baker Park this fall! No experience needed--free training provided in September. For more information and training dates, call Nearby Nature at 687-9699, email info@nearbynature.org, or see www.nearbynature.org.

ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics 2009-2010

18 September - Charles Goodrich – Nature Writer:
"New pests every day: A Gardener-Poet's Adventures in Natural History"

16 October - David Noakes – Geologist: "Iceland Rocks"

20 November - Nora Terwilliger – Marine Biologist: "Invertebrate Natural History"

11 December - John M. Marzluff – Ornithologist: "Crows and Ravens"

15 January - Rick Boatner – Wildlife Biologist: "Exotic Species, like Bullfrogs"

19 February - Greg Retallack – Geologist: "Past Climate Crises"

19 March - Sue Beilke – Herpetologist: "Turtles"

16 April - TBA

21 May - Pat Kennedy – Ecologist: "Habitat Conservation in NE Oregon"

We welcome new members! To join ENHS, fill out the form below. You will receive *Nature Trails* through December of next year. Membership payments allow us to give modest honoraria to our speakers, as well as to pay for the publication and mailing of *Nature Trails*.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mail checks to **Eugene Natural History Society**

P.O. Box 3082, Eugene, OR 97403

Name_____

Phone_____

Address_____

E-mail (optional)_____

City_____State & Zip_____

ANNUAL DUES: Contributing 20.00

Family 15.00

Individual 10.00

Life Membership 300.00

Generosity is Appreciated

Do you have any special experience in natural history?_____

Would you like to organize/lead field trips?_____

Teach informal classes?_____

Work on committees?_____

What natural history topics interest you for future talks?_____

ENHS OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS 2008-2009

President: Tom Titus titus@uoneuro.uoregon.edu 484-4477

First Vice President: Melody Clarkson jmclarkson@q.com 334-6883

Second Vice President and Immediate Past President: David Wagner davidwagner@mac.com
344-3327

Secretary: reida Kimmel

Treasurer: Judi Horstmann

Board: Ruth Bremiller, John Carter, John Fentress, Pete Helzer, Evelyn McConnaughey, Marge Zane,

reida Kimmel <rkimmel@uoneuro.uoregon.edu>

Nature Trails: Editor, John Carter, jvernoncarter@comcast.net 349-2439; Support Staff, Ruth Bremiller and reida Kimmel

Eugene Natural History Society
P.O. Box 3082
Eugene, Oregon 97403

FIRST CLASS MAIL