

arms is to dare to have the courage to feel small. To kneel before the season's first calypso orchid and feel the dew-slick flutter of its sensuous pink petals pass delicately among one's fingers is to allow the recognition that flowering plants have endured the passage of epochal time with no hang-ups at all about sex! And to feel regret at the sight of a three-log load headed downtown on a Peterbilt Habitat Hearse is to allow the frank tragedy of industrial forestry to color one's thoughts with a candid slant on sanity.

Not all of us enjoy abundant opportunity to take the time to listen to the lessons given by the plants which preceded our tenure by ages. We are a people driven inexorably by monetary and material need. We will forever find our stifled cloister in cities, and, as is said in the Nation of Humboldt, We Will Always Cut. Yet there is, I feel, a vital spiritual assuagement to be found in even the most modest representation and honoring of native vegetation and the Earth-tie murmurings it bespeaks. A feeling of belonging may be found by noting the silent life of a cluster of redwood shoots growing tall from an old stump in the backyard, or a rootbound fir in a pot on a porch, even a patch of salal in a forgotten corner.

In the course of landscaping our yard, my partner and I have elected to forego the seemingly mandatory Monterey pines, hedge-trimmed ornamental junipers, and pampas grass which causes so many properties to resemble botanical chaos. Although we have made a few concessions to the qualities of favorable exotics, Jude and I are planting and nurturing a broad selection of native trees and shrubs. Rather than line our small pond with a trendy threesome of European birches, we have transplanted cuttings of willows from places in the Humboldt coastal dunes where we have enjoyed good birding. The shady microsite afforded by the north-facing bank of the pond now supports madienhair ferns. Among the conifers which will rise in time to replace the Douglas-firs presently above the property are hemlock and grand fir. Salal struggles a bit in the summer sun along the western fenceline, yet it will persist, reminding us at every glance of glad times hiking in the forest. Jasmine trails over the front gate, but it is complemented by sword ferns and lilies.

In pausing to consider the humble plants around us, one may find humble calm. As members of a species whose very success foretells an uncertain future, we would do well to give a nod to the natives whose resilience offers lessons well worth attending.

## On the touch of dappled light nearest home (February 1998)

by David Fix

Throughout my life as a naturalist, the experiences and moments of epiphany I have beheld have each been made richer--and indeed have been given much of their very definition--by native vegetation and the lands they clothe. Although my greatest interest has long been birds, the essential images I can recall of the places I've lived and worked all are of the vegetal cover. I have been fortunate to have lived in the midst of great forestlands as well as out on the sagebrush steppe. The periods of my life are defined by images long since branded into my mind's eye as if with an iron: the sprawling old-growth stands of the western Cascades; the ash swales and and shrubby stream-sides of the southern Willamette Valley; oak-and-pastureland mosaic of interior Humboldt County; subalpine meadows in northwestern Montana; the greasewood flats of the northern Great Basin playas.

To be sure, I have enjoyed birds in many places--I well remember my first Townsend's Solitaire nest, and each of the Gyrfalcons I've watched--yet I find that the deepest ties I have to my patch of ground knot me fast to the Earth in swirls and swatches of leafy greenery, half a million miles with but scant surcease, shadowed and breeze-nodding under my forty years of sun passages. These images conjure up memories of kid afternoons learning warbler songs; the high-sun mid-days of my twenties, cruising virgin timber tucked deep in fern-dense canyons, and the evenings of my thirties, standing on a ridge-nose in the dark, vocally Fishing For Rare Owls In The West.

Altogether I have but to close my eyes and envision a thicket of vine maple or lodgepole pine, and the rightness of my work, my pastime, and the faces of colleagues and companions--some of whom to which I might no longer place a name--come flooding back in the instant. The feelings of rightness and strength these images engender within my heart have played a great role in my perception of who it is I am, and who I may become. I have paid attention to the trees, the shrubs, and the bracken, and I have come away a better person for it. This, for me, is the greatest blessing bestowed upon my psyche by those voiceless and insentient sister beings who cannot speak, and who cannot vote.

As I grow older, I feel an apprehension creep more frequently into mind. It is the uneasy sense that those of us living in the United States are a citizenry becoming more and more removed from ties which bind us mindfully into a relationship with Earth. This feeling passes through my consciousness each day, although I attempt to explain it away, to quell and quash it, and to manufacture a flawed peace.

It comes to mind in bitter manifest when I flip through the business section of the newspaper and glance at the monochrome photos of flinty-eyed executives with vertical lines brutally creasing their foreheads, stating that the outlook for the third fiscal quarter is outstanding. I know the feeling whenever I overhear cliques of the Conceptually Challenged extolling the great new fall lineup on the Fox television network. I see it in the eyes of pudgy children in stylish duds who pout in distraction and disinterest at scenic vistas in the hinterlands, while Dad or Mom fumbles with the camcorder. And I know my feeling has validity when I read the in the editorial pages that the Pacific Lumber Company has been picked on enough already. It is apparent to me that the realm through which we pick our wending way has, in the minds of many, been increasingly reduced to swabbed pastels and a wasted search of happiness down karmic box canyons of material pursuit. We are, I fear, a society overcome by compulsory Disneyfication, and by an estrangement of our spiritual base.

To sit alone at the side of a road and gaze thoughtless across forty miles of hazy ridges brushed unkempt with the gesturings of great and ancient firs is to know ease. To hug a declining white pine sad-burnished with the gilt of introduced blister rust is to sympathize with one who cannot offer thanks. To appreciate the stubborn tilt and skew of wind-trained junipers in a lost draw on the slopes of an unpeopled mount is to recognize the quickness of the lifetime of a person. To hop the fence at Big Tree and span a twentieth of its squat circumference with outstretched