

Adopting a naturalist's mindset

'Earth Almanac' offers wisdom for staying in tune with your surroundings

Just in time for the summer solstice, now is the perfect time to dive into the new "Earth Almanac: Nature's Calendar for Year-Round Discovery."

Published by Skipstone Press, an imprint of Seattle's Mountaineers Books, I expected that this book would focus on the Pacific Northwest, which would keep with my own regional partiality.

But I was wrong. This book has a much wider scope. Author Ken Keffer is a Midwest-based naturalist. He takes on the bulk of North America, with occasional forays out into the solar system and beyond, in this catalog of 365 daily entries, with heaps of sidebars that contain additional nuggets of wisdom.

"Being a naturalist is a mindset," he says in the book's introduction. "Naturalists are always in tune with their surroundings."

And in pointing out the curiosities and wonders of the natural world, Keffer invites you to suss out the relationships and connections between life forms and the environment they're situated in, both close to home and further afield.

While Keffer organizes the book by beginning in December with the winter solstice, you can start reading at any point. And although the book is designed to be consumed in compact, one-entry-per-day doses, it's likely you'll find the information so intriguing that you'll plow through several pages in one sitting.

Here's a sampling of posts:

For Jan. 12, Keffer writes about irruptions, "the wild cards of bird migration," which are driven by both food availability and population dynamics.

On April 10, he writes about myrmecochory, pollination by ants. Trillium and bleeding heart are two myrmecochorous species — who knew?

On July 1, he notes that on that date in 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt created more than a dozen national forests, including Deschutes National Forest in Oregon. On Dec. 19, 2014, President Barack Obama designated a Nevada

archaeological site, Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument, that has fossils of mammoths and camels.

Keffer writes about skunks and sturgeon, dandelions and the Perseids. Every day is a new chance to ponder the manifold wonders of the natural world.

This Week's Book

'Earth Almanac'
by Ken Keffer

Skipstone Press —
256 pp — \$24.95

He also points out how adaptations to environment have led to resilience. One example is the oversized paws of Canada lynx, which help the big cat cross snowy terrain. But specialized adaptations can be a vulnerability when environmental conditions change or when humans interfere.

Rather than despair, Keffer offers citizen science and environmental action opportunities.

The almanac's interesting entries are complemented by over 100 pen-and-ink illustrations by artist Jeremy Collins.

We're all living in a season of tumult

right now, the kind of change that isn't captured in "Earth Almanac." But there is some comfort to be derived in leafing through the pages of this book and being reminded that nature's patterns of ebb and flow take place reliably in our annual circuit around the sun.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com.

