

Spring 2019 - "A Walk With Spring"



Dear Everybody:

NORTH IDAHO: "Whenever we give to Nature, she gives back in spades." I have been telling others for years, because it is so true -- and hopeful. I was reminded of it again some mornings ago when I opened my eyes to find the rising sun - and spring - staring me in the face through my bedroom window. The mountains, meadows and the marshes that with your help we have worked - for more than twenty years - to restore were waiting for me in the buttery sunlight. So I dressed, pulled on my 'mucks,' and began my walk around the marsh to welcome spring.

The plaintive honks and whistling wings of Canada geese greeted me. Many had not landed yet they were at war over territories and flushing green grass. I watched eight of them landing on a frozen pond. The older ones had the knack for flaring their wings, barely leaving skid-marks when they touched-down on the ice. One of the young birds skidded off the 'runway' into a snow bank, flapped its wings squawking raucously as it shook off the white crystals. Since then more have arrived - eight times the number before we restored the marsh.

The 'chiiiiirrrrr' calls of red-winged blackbirds sheltering in stands of reed canary grass and cattail rushes sounded along the marsh. Swallows swooped low over the meadows and inky waters, each catching 850 insects a day keeping the mosquitos at a more tolerable number.

A black-bear's tracks revealed that it and others had emerged from dens after their long winter sleep, headed for the meadow along the marsh to fatten up on the flush of emerging grasses. Grizzlies, denning higher in the mountains would follow. According to the 2017 US Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Team report, the Selkirk mountain population has climbed to minimum of 61 bears while an estimated 35 roam the Cabinet-Yaak wilderness. Their numbers have slowly increased under the protection of the Endangered Species Act; and despite human-induced mortality, accounting for 60% of grizzly deaths: hunters mistaking grizzlies for black bears; grizzlies shot in self-defense; killing grizzlies for pestering humans and domestic stock, plus grizzlies struck by cars, trucks and trains, etc.

Three weeks earlier, after a light dusting of new snow, I had noted the near-perfect etchings left by the wings of a Great Horned Owl as it flared after 'stooping' on a meadow vole. Poor vole: A blood spot and a tuft of grey fur was all that remained of it. The etchings from the owl's wings were so perfectly detailed that they could have been drawn by an artist.



One morning as I hiked in the mountains near the Canadian border my eye caught the tracks of a lone wolf. My breath caught: I had not seen wolf tracks or heard wolves howl for almost four years: I had first sighted a coal black wolf with piercing amber eyes while riding my horse in the mountains in 2002. That next spring he was back with a blonde female whom he was courting - by covering her tracks and scent marks with his own. The pair denned behind a cleft in the mountains and weeks later the brave shrill squeals of their five pups strained to emulate the

howls of their parents. The next spring the pair had seven pups, and then nine the following year. For the next twelve years, wolves sang their songs and roamed the wilderness.

In 2008, when the feds returned the management of wolves to Idaho's governor and his minions, their draconian 'wolf management' (eradication!) programs' put this species in trouble. Three years after the State re-opened a hunting/trapping/snaring season on wolves almost all had been killed. For four years their songs and tracks were gone and a loneliness stalked the valleys and mountains.

One early winter night two years ago I was camping in the wilderness when I heard the soaring sonorous howl of a lone wolf rise to the mountain peaks. It called again and again, but never got an answer. Last winter I found his tracks -- still alone. Then early this year I found his prints again, but this time they were covering those of a female. Furthermore, both sets of prints were headed straight toward the cleft in the mountains where the original pair had denned more than sixteen years earlier. Was this a mated pair?

Then one of my neighbor's horses died - so I placed its remains near the wolf rendezvous of so many years ago, and set up a trail camera. For the next three days only a raven or two fed. Then a single wolf fed for a week, but was hardly able to gnaw any meat off the frozen carcass. EIGHT wolves came the next night and devoured the rest of the offering by morning!! They remained in the area for another week, but they never gave themselves away by calling. This next generation has apparently learned to keep their mouths shut or be killed. In the past we have also noted that most of our adult Kalahari lion research subjects stopped roaring when they left the game reserve to enter trophy hunting and ranching areas; that elephants learned to drink at the Luangwa River only at night when ivory poachers were asleep, and to never trumpet when they slaked their thirst.

So the wolves seem to be returning to the deep wilderness, but they are different in their silence: Less free, more wary and timid, much less willing to show themselves; leaving behind only the images on my trail camera and their tracks as evidence that we still share Earth with them ... but for how much longer? One day, perhaps before it is too late, mankind will realize that we will have no Earth without them, that our destinies are intertwined.



I walked on, to see bluebirds return to our meadows, and robins pulling fat worms from the grass. As I approached the levee at the end of the marsh a rattling cry sounded from the tall grass ahead...a sound that I had never before heard. And then two enormous birds stood up out of the grass not thirty yards ahead: at more than four feet tall, and with wing spans of up to seven feet, they were enormous. I took photos and recorded their calls, then headed for my computer. Have you guessed it yet?? They were Sandhill Cranes, one of the oldest species of birds on the planet (a fossil found in Nebraska has been dated from 10 million years ago).

I could go on about otters, Great Gray Owls, moose, and more, but you get the picture: Nature does give back many-fold when we invest in her and give her a chance.

We are trying to raise money to secure other grizzly, wolf and bear habitats, and more marshlands, most of which have been drained and 'reclaimed' with subsidies from the federal government in the name of agriculture. But with climate change and increasing water shortages, policy makers are beginning to realize that these creek bottoms, bogs and marshes are some of our most productive habitats, that they are great sponges soaking up and holding ground water rather than conveying it back to the sea ASAP. Before we began restoring this marsh, the water table below and the surrounding area was drying up: Many of the wells that were supplying water to households were instead pumping sand in mid to late summer every year. But within a few days of releasing water back to the reconstructed marsh, the water table as far downstream as a mile or more jumped by twenty to thirty feet. Since then water shortages have been a thing of the past -- at least for now. So restoring marshes is a win-win for wildlife and human communities. Nature gives back.



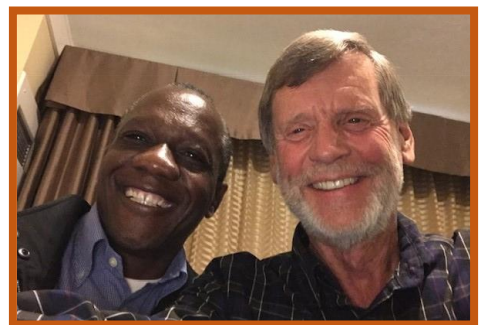
AFRICA: Hammer, our spectacular protégé' continues improving the living standards of thousands of rural Africans with sustainable small businesses, improved agriculture, rural health initiatives, conservation education programs, reforestation and more - all so that villagers will not have to poach to sustain themselves. This approach has become a model for community conservation in many parts of Africa and South America, and it has made North Luangwa one of the most secure National Parks on that continent.



Not long before Delia and I left Africa in 1996, I surveyed an ancient migratory route that elephants, Cape buffaloes and many other species once used to climb up and out of the Luangwa Valley and march west to the Bangweulu Wetlands during dry seasons and in times of drought. This route to water and forage during periods of intense stress have provided relief to the animals that use it, thereby offering them resilience and adaptability to drought and other environmental challenges. For decades ivory has been a sought-after commodity for poachers, trophy hunters and other 'ivory interests' who have reduced the number of animals whose instinct it

was to use this migratory route. But if we can keep them alive, they will use it again; and because of the stress from climate change and exploding human populations it has never been more important to the survival of its animal trekkers.

So when Hammer came to the USA to attend the Global Climate Action Summit last fall, we agreed that he should again propose restoring this migration to government officials and local tribal chiefs. He did, and they are all enthusiastically on board. So now we are attempting to raise funds for another survey of this migration route so that we have baseline data on the number of animals still



using it, the density of human settlements in and along the corridor, and other obstacles to its restoration. **Here is a small update from Hammer:**

We have just concluded a 10 year Game Management Plan for Mukungule Game Management Area hosted by the Department of National Parks and sponsored by Frankfort Zoological Society which was held in Mpika.


We had over 50 participants and a good presentation from Community Resource Boards and a team from Chilanga [Zambian Park's Department] Frankfort staff and several line ministry staff. It was during the same workshop where I also presented the Wildlife Corridor issue to link North/South Luangwa Parks [in the Luangwa Valley] to Lavushi Manda Park and the Bangweulu Wetlands [located on top of the Muchinga Escarpment]. From this meeting we have now come up with a joint team to conduct a scooping exercise to look at the migratory corridor in detail.

I am scheduled for a meeting tomorrow with the National Parks planner to set out logistics plans for the trip to the migration corridor. It has taken time to conduct this trip due to heavy rains and impassable roads, but it's now dry and this trip will be well conducted. I will give a full detailed report in the next two to three weeks. One of the main objectives of this trip is to find out the current status of the remaining elephants in the area.

Please donate to help us continue this important work as well as village development programs. Thank you!



After so many years of observing brown hyenas, walking the river banks of Luangwa measuring elephant foot prints and working for wildlife in the Pacific Northwest, Delia has found that it is time to step back. Her life of dedication lives on in the people and wildlife that she has protected and she sends thanks to each of you who have supported our work. I will continue my efforts and hope you will too!

Cheers! 



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