

AUGUST 2021

NOTES OF A NATURALIST

A monthly newsletter bringing you the species, landscape, history, and happenings of the Taft-Nicholson Center

Late Summer in Centennial Valley

Summer is slowly coming to an end. Subtle changes in temperature and daylight signal the approaching transition of seasons. Recent rainstorms brought us a taste of cooler weather. Shifts in animals' behavior also indicate the approach of fall as they prepare for the colder months ahead.

Late summer is a time of increased activity for many animals. Pronghorn sightings become more common as they begin to gather in larger groups for the mating season. Moose and elk are also preparing for the rut and making their presence more widely known in the valley. This is the time of year when moose are more likely to be found on campus, browsing on the willows and aspens.

Some birds like magpies, kestrels, and Clark's nutcrackers have been more frequently spotted, perhaps taking advantage of food while it's still abundant. Other birds have already begun their departure. Hummingbirds have embarked on their long journeys south, after being seen a few final times fueling up at feeders. Swallows, who were filling the sky above campus only a couple of weeks ago, are also noticeably less abundant.



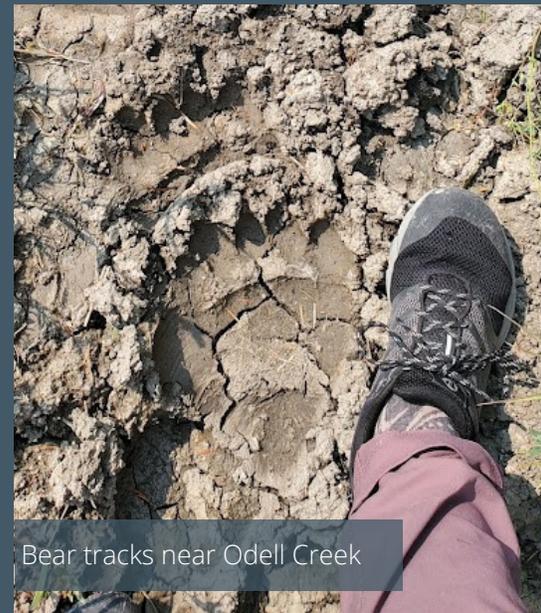
Moose grazing on campus
Photo credit: Chris Montgomery

Ground squirrels have already disappeared into their dens, where they will hibernate for up to 9 months, emerging again in March. Other hibernating animals are increasing their food uptake to prepare for hibernation. This physiological process is known as hyperphagia. For bears, this process can last from mid-August until early November. During the peak of hyperphagia, bears may spend up to 20 hours foraging in one day.

Stay Bear Aware

Bear activity is increasing as they search for food. This means bear encounters can become more likely, making it extra important to stay bear aware when recreating in Grizzly country. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Stay alert and be aware of signs of bear activity, such as tracks or scat.
- Make noise, and travel in groups if possible.
- Always carry bear spray, and know how to use it.



Bear tracks near Odell Creek

Meet the Artist-in-Residence: Melissa Kwasny



Melissa Kwasny is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *Where Outside the Body is the Soul Today* (University of Washington Press Pacific Northwest Poetry Series) and *Pictograph* (Milkweed Editions), as well as a collection of prose writings, *Earth Recitals: Essays on Image and Vision* (Lynx House Press). She is the editor of *Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry 1800–1950* (Wesleyan University Press) and co-editor, with M.L. Smoker, of the anthology *I Go to the Ruined Place: Contemporary Poets in Defense of Global Human Rights* (Lost Horse Press). Recently published by Trinity University Press, *Putting on the Dog: The Animal Origins of What We Wear* is her first book of investigative nonfiction.

The recipient of the Poetry Society of America's Cecil Hemley Award and Alice Fay di Castagnola Award for a work in progress, the Montana Art Council's Artist's Innovation Award, and residencies at Vermont Studio Center, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Hedgebrook, Ucross, and the Headlands Center for the Arts, Kwasny has taught as visiting writer at both the undergraduate and graduate level, including MFA programs at the University of Wyoming, Eastern Washington University/Inland Pacific Center for Writers, and the University of Montana. She teaches literature at Carroll College in Helena and in Lesley University's Integrated Arts in Learning Masters Program in Education.

Kwasny shares the position of Montana Poet Laureate for 2019-2021 with M.L. Smoker. They have recently been awarded an Academy of American Poets Fellowship.

"Many of us are used to being in nature, but being at the Taft Nicholson Environmental Center is seeing nature close up. It has been a stunning privilege to spend weeks living in the midst of trumpeter swans and their cygnets, white-faced ibis, and nesting eared grebes, numerous moose, antelope, and deer, and to learn about them from the extremely knowledgeable—and generous—staff. The solitude afforded me at the Taft-Nicholson Environmental Center allowed me to accomplish more than was my plan and at the same time offered me countless lessons in ecology and stewardship. Thank goodness there are places that exist like this in the world, not only for me but for the animals, birds, and plants that find refuge there."

-Melissa Kwasny

Air Quality Monitoring

We have a new air quality monitor set up at the Taft-Nicholson Center. This monitor collects real-time data, showing us the particulates in the air at any given moment. PurpleAir uses the EPA's Air Quality Index (AQI) to report air quality. The AQI scale runs from 0 to 500, with higher values representing higher levels of air pollution particulates. There are six different categories: green (0-50), yellow (51-100), orange (101-150), red (151-200), purple (201-300), and maroon (301-500)

Check the real-time data here:
<https://www.purpleair.com/map?opt=1/mAQI/a10/cc0&select=108034#11/44.5981/-111.8113>

You can also check to see if there are Purple Air sensors set up in your area.