

JULY 2021

# NOTES OF A NATURALIST

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

## Taft-Nicholson Center Happenings

We have been so grateful to once again be able to host faculty fellows and artists-in-residence this summer. Our goal as an environmental humanities center is to provide interdisciplinary experiences where humanities, arts and sciences can be in dialogue. These programs do just that. Throughout July this year, we hosted ten faculty members representing the departments of biology, architecture, geology, visual art, writing, sociology, and educational psychology.

Our faculty fellows presented on their research projects during a small symposium. Each discussed the projects they've been working on here at the Taft-Nicholson Center. Topics included how embryos protect themselves from UV radiation; the importance of math in expanding our understanding of biology; using gender, race and queer theory in the field of architecture; how science classrooms can be a place to encourage productive disagreements; and what is possible when art and science merge. It was an honor to be able to host such a brilliant group of people this summer and to be a place where these interdisciplinary discussions are happening. A huge thank you to Fred Adler, Brenda Bowen, Wendy Wischer, Michael Mejia, James Gagnon, Ofer Rog, Lisa Henry, Lauren Bergenheier, Lynne Zummo, and Becky Utz for joining us this summer. You can read more about the projects they worked on during their stay on our website:

<https://taft-nicholson.utah.edu/research/summer-fellows.php>



## Wildflower Spotlight

It's peak wildflower season! Here are a few of our favorites to see around the valley.



Elephantheads (*Pedicularis groenlandica*) are parasitic plants. They use specialized roots called haustoria to tap into the roots of other plants and steal nutrients.



Paintbrushes (*Castilleja* spp) are also known to parasitize other plants. There are over 22 species in the Greater Yellowstone region.

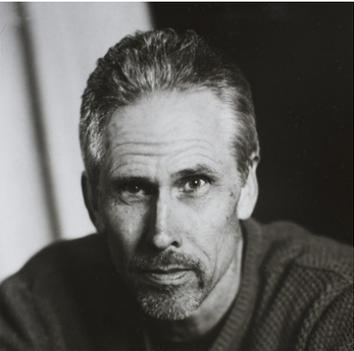


Sticky geraniums (*Geranium viscosissimum*), true to their name, are covered in sticky hairs. They are thought to be protocarnivorous - they may be able to dissolve and absorb nutrients from insects that get trapped on their leaves!



# Meet the Artist-in-Residence: Bob Armstrong

"I have lived in San Francisco for my entire life, and my paintings are deeply influenced by its natural beauty. This engagement with beauty carries over into my travels to other areas throughout the American West, and is my inspiration in all of my work. I celebrate this world by carving into wood panels, because wood is an organic material that transports us into nature. In this process, I seek a meditative journey that calms and inspires.



My concern with the environment is also central to my work. The importance of preserving and enhancing our natural environment is among the most pressing issues today. The world we live in needs protecting, and by emphasizing its beauty, I hope to call attention not only to what we have but what we might lose.



I display my work in outdoor art shows, at Open Studios, and at local galleries. In addition, my studio art also engages with the world through education. I work half time as the Art Coordinator at Buena Vista Horace Mann, a public inner city Kinder through 8th grade Spanish Immersion school in San Francisco's Mission district, and my job there for 20 years has been to ensure that all of the students receive a strong education in Dance, Music, and Visual Art. I use my connections as a San Francisco artist to help with this."

# Wildflowers (cont.)



The inconspicuous flowers of green gentians (*Frasera speciosa*), also known as monument plants, grow on large stalks that can sometimes reach over 5 feet tall. They are monocarpic, meaning they die after they flower and go to seed. They can live over 20 years prior to flowering.

Fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) grows in disturbed areas, and is one of the early successional species following a wildfire. Their leaves are full of vitamin C, and can be fermented and dried to be brewed like tea leaves.



# Wildfire Season

This year's fire season started early in Centennial Valley. A wildfire has been burning north of Elk Lake since July 1st. Our smoke-filled views have been a daily sobering reminder of the impacts of climate change on wildfire seasons throughout the western United States. Wildfires do play an important role in mountain ecosystems in the west, providing disturbances that can lead to an increase in flora and fauna diversity, and some plant species even rely on fires for reproduction. But climate change is leading to a pattern of more frequent and more severe fires, which throws off this balance of succession. Fire season is starting earlier and lasting longer. It is estimated that today, at least 50% of wildfires can be linked to climate change.

We are so appreciative of the fire crews working hard to keep fire contained. You can keep track of the Goose Fire here: <https://inciweb.nwccg.gov/incident/7618/>



Goose Fire smoke plume  
Photo credit: Melissa Parks

<https://taft-nicholson.utah.edu/>

FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA   